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THE

Wing of Azrael.

BY

MONA CAIRD.

Yesterday, this Day's madness did prepare
To-morrow's Silence, Triumph or Despair.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TRÜBNER & CO., LUDGATE HILL.
1889.
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Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
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TO

ELIZABETH A. SHARP,

THIS BOOK

IS

DEDICATED

WITH

GRATEFUL AND ADMIRING AFFECTION.

PREFACE.

Much has been said for and against the writing of "novels with a purpose."

As well might one argue for and against the finding of the Philosopher's Stone. The work of fiction whose motive is not the faithful rendering of an impression from without, but the illustration of a thesis—though that thesis be the corner-stone of Truth itself—has adopted the form of a novel for the purposes of an essay, and has no real right to the name. So long as there is true consistency in the actions and thoughts of the characters, so long as they act and think because circumstances and innate impulse leave them no alternative, they cannot be fitted into exact correspondence with any view or made into the advocates of any cause. If the author preserve his literary fidelity, rebellion among the actors inevitably springs up. Far from being puppets, as they are so often erroneously

called, they are creatures with a will and a stubborn personality who often drive the stage-manager to the brink of despair; and as for being ready to "point a moral and adorn a tale" at his bidding, they would sooner throw up their parts and leave him alone on the deserted stage to lament his own obstinacy and their insubordination.

Human affairs are too complex, motives too many and too subtle, to allow a small group of persons to become the exponents of a general principle, however true. An argument founded on this narrow basis would be without value, though it were urged with the eloquence of a Demosthenes.

Certain selected aspects of a truth may be—indeed must be—presented to the reader with insistence; for the impressions made upon a mind by the facts of life depend upon the nature of that mind which emotionally urges upon the neutral vision one fact rather than another, and thus ends in producing a more or less selective composition, and not a photograph.

But this process—entirely purposeless—takes place in the mind of every one, though he be as innocent as a babe of any tendency to weave romances; the most strictly matter-of-fact person being, indeed, the

arch-offender as regards deviation from the centre of general truth. His own faculties and prejudice, in this case, play the artist, selecting images of reality which group themselves after a certain inevitable fashion; and these represent for him what he is pleased to call real life, with its "morals" and its "lessons," precisely corresponding, not to existence itself, but to the judgment and the temper of the unconscious dramatist.

"The eye only sees that which it brings with it the power of seeing," whether "the eye" belong to one who describes his impression or to him who allows it to be written secretly on his heart. For in the heart of each man lies a recorded drama, sternly without purpose, yet more impressive and inevitable in its teaching than the most purposeful novel ever written.

To transcribe this invisible world so that the impress becomes revealed, is to write a novel; good, bad, or indifferent, as the case may be, but a novel *par excellence*, and not an essay.

The writer of fiction has to present, as best he may, a real impression made upon him, including the effect of such impulse to the imagination as it may have given, and of all the art—if art there be—or exercise

of fancy by which the record is faithfully conveyed to other minds.

To reveal that image with so much skill that the vividness of the representation is hardly less than that of the original, is to write a novel well, though even yet the image itself may not be of sufficient interest to make its record of extreme value.

These are, according to my view, the conditions of the novel: first, of its claim to the title at all; secondly, of its merit; and thirdly, of its greatness, which implies the fulfilment of the other two conditions, while demanding also that the impression recorded shall be fine enough and striking enough to appeal to those sympathies in human nature which are most noble and most generous, as well as to that mysterious sense of proportion and beauty which holds relation to the suppressed and ill-treated, but ever-present poetic instincts of mankind.

I have described these unattained ideals of the art of fiction in order to show as convincingly as possible that however much this book may be thought to deal with the question recently so much discussed, there is no intention on the writer's part to make it serve a polemical "purpose" or to advocate a cause.

Its object is not to contest or to argue, but to represent. However much it fails, that is its aim.

If anywhere temptation is yielded to and the action is dragged out of its course in order to serve any opinion of my own, if anywhere, for that object, a character is made to think or to speak inconsistently with himself and his surroundings, therein must be recognised my want of skill, not my deliberate intention,—the failure of my design, not its fulfilment.

MONA CAIRD.

INTRODUCTION.

AZRAEL or Azazel, according to Muhammadan and Jewish writings, was the Angel of Death, of Fate, of Destruction. Azazel or Zamiel is the Jewish name for this angel. He separates the soul from the body, and is associated with the idea of evil and malignant Fate. He has been identified with Typhon; his dwelling is in the desert or wilderness which is the emblem of immeasurable, all-devouring Time.

"Aaron shall cast lots upon two goats, one lot for Jehovah, and the other for Azazel. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the lot for Jehovah fell, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat on which the lot for Azazel fell, shall be presented alive before Jehovah, to make atonement with him, to let him go to Azazel in the wilderness."

"And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities

unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness."

"And he that let go the goat for the scapegoat shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterwards come into the camp."

"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness."

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THE WING OF AZRAEL.

CHAPTER I.

MIST.

THE great stable-yard clock was slowly striking the hour—midnight. Over the park hung a white and stealthy mist, touched by white and stealthy moonlight. Great elm-trees loomed through it heavy and still: they seemed to be waiting for something that never came.

The mist was thick, but one could see through it a large white house with innumerable majestic windows, very broad and very high. Even in this dim light it was evident that everything was falling into decay. Grass grew in the shrubberies, and weeds in the gravel-paths; it was a melancholy, forsaken old place, closed in, and silent as the grave. The house stood hushed in the moonlight, with blinds drawn, windows closed,—all but one blind and one window on the first floor, on that side of the house which faced the garden, and beyond it a steep avenue of elm-trees.

At that open window a small figure was kneeling; a dark-haired little girl, who leant her elbows on the sill and gazed up the mystic avenue. The line of trees led the eye to the top of the hill, and there ending, created an unsatisfied longing to see over the other side. The child peered forth eagerly into the still, passionless mystery of the night. Throngs of bewildering thoughts were stirring the little soul to its depths:—what was it, and whence this strange world that does NOT come to an end at the top of the avenue, at the boundary of the park?—this world that goes on and on, field after field, till it comes to the sea, and then goes on and on again, wave after wave, till it comes once more to the land, and then——? then the realms of the air, and the great cloud-regions, and beyond these—Nothing, a great all-embracing Nothing that *will* not stop; that goes on and on, and still on, till the brain reels at the thought of it—but it does not stop then; it never stops, or would stop, or could stop, even when God sounded the last trumpet and the worlds shrivelled up in the flames on the Judgment Day—how, even then, could it stop?

Could God Himself order that there should not be that great thought-confounding Emptiness? The child shuddered at the impious doubt, but her perplexed little mind stag-

gered under the weight of the questions that came tumbling over one another in their haste.

The mystery of her own existence;—that was a terrible perplexity to the little metaphysician. Was this being, this *self* a reality in this strange, cold region of Nothingness? Was anything real and actual, or was it all a mistake, a shadow, a mist which would presently melt again into the void?

Yet if there were no reality, whence these thoughts? The child touched herself tentatively. Yes, she was, she *must* be real; a separate being called Viola Sedley,—with thoughts of her own, entirely her own, whom nobody in all this big world quite knew. *Viola Sedley;*—she repeated the name over and over to herself, as if to gain some clearer conception of her position in relation to the universe, but the arbitrary name only deepened the sense of mystery. Am *I*, this thought and feeling, Viola Sedley? Will the thought that I shall think, and the feeling that I shall feel to-morrow, be Viola Sedley too? It seemed awful to the child to be walking in the midst of "eternal verities" without knowing them; to be plunged in Infinite Nothingness, and not understand if it would some day swallow us up, or if we should be rescued by the living Thought that seemed to have so true an existence. How

had Thought prevailed against that Nothingness, risen out of its heart, if it were not some real thing stronger than all?

Voila could not have expressed these questions in words; but her ideas, preceding language (though so intimately related to it), stretched out into regions where she could find no answer, and where no answer was to be found.

Conceptions of God, Nature, Destiny, were running riot in the child's consciousness, her strict religious training raising questions without giving solutions, and torturing her with a sense of inconsistency demanding double-faced belief. The doctrine of eternal punishment had already begun to haunt this lonely child with its terrors. From long association, the gloom of the great park and the giant trees seemed to her to speak warningly of what was to come. The place was full of voices and of symbols. The elm avenue led to the outer world beyond the park, the world where there was sunshine and a wide horizon, strong winds and liberty. Here at home a belt of dark trees shut out the far-away skies, here one seldom felt the open winds; it was stagnant and eventless. To go up that avenue and away into the world had been one of Viola's most passionate longings from her earliest childhood. From the summit one could catch a glimpse of the sea, the wonderful sea that spoke

and sang all the year long, in winter and summer, through the warm days and through all the long dark nights—eternally speaking and prophesying and lamenting. Viola thought that if only she could reach the sea she would not be lonely any more. She would throw herself down beside it, and it would know everything: all the fear and the longing, and the love and pity that was in her; and then the pain would go, and the waters would creep up to her softly and tell her not to grieve, and she would fling herself into the beautiful waves, and then—— Suddenly the child stretched out her arms and sank against the window, passionately sobbing.

Very white and very still was the mist to-night. Even in high midsummer it might often be seen hanging about that damp old park, and this was early in the spring, before the bursting of the leaf.

One might fancy that the mist lay as a curse upon the place, shrouding all things, chilling all things, bringing to all things rottenness and decay.

Was there some influence in the atmosphere of that old house that was like the still, penetrating mist without?—something that worked its stealthy way into the heart, shrouding all things, chilling all things, bringing to all things rottenness and decay?

CHAPTER II.

A YOUNG MAN CALLED MOMUS.

VIOLA SEDLEY, the youngest and the only girl among a family of boys, was a pale, dark-haired little creature, with large grey eyes and delicately cut features. People said that she exactly resembled her mother, but the resemblance was only superficial. Mrs. Sedley's hair was smooth and shining, while Viola's fell about her massively, for it was heavy and thick. Mrs. Sedley's eyes were brown and quiet; Viola's had the grey, shifting tint, that marks the nervous temperament, and the yearning look of a sensitive, bewildered soul. Her father saw only the likeness between mother and daughter, and he called the child, in impatient displeasure, "a little Puritan." He would have preferred to see her a robust, coarse-fibred creature of his own kind; a girl who would have no reserve or sensitiveness or subtleties of feeling. Mrs. Sedley, with her still, dutiful ways and religious principles, had irritated him from the first day of her meek reign at the Manor-House, and he was

highly displeased to find that Viola promised to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Mr. Sedley, by nature, was blustering and self-indulgent, but on the whole well-meaning, with the fatal habit of so many people who mean well, of getting into debt. His wife's tendencies, on the other hand, were ascetic. Her conscience never let her rest until she had made things as unpleasant for herself as circumstances would permit, and by long practice in the art, she had now achieved a ghastly power of self-suppression. Her reward had been the approval of her own conscience and the half-contemptuous approbation of her lord. He regarded her, in the most literal and simple-minded manner, as his possession, and Mrs. Sedley piously encouraged him in an idea which she thought was amply confirmed by the Scriptures.

Happy the religion and happy the society that can secure beings of Marian Sedley's type for its worshippers, for the faith of such people remains as steady under "conspiracies of tempest from without, and tempest from within," as it stands beaming with uplifted eyes on days of halcyon calm. Rooted beyond the farthest wanderings of the Reason, it lies securely out of reach of any attack that may be directed against it through that ungracious faculty.

Mrs. Sedley, following the dictates of her creed, had

spent her life in the performance of what she called her wifely duty, and this unfailing submissiveness, this meek and saint-like endurance, had now succeeded in turning a man originally good-hearted into a creature so selfish, so thick-headed, and often so brutal, that even his all-enduring wife used to wonder, at times, if Heaven would give her grace to bear her heavy cross patiently to the end!

Nature—regardless, as usual, of motives—was taking her stern revenge upon the woman who had spent her whole virtuous life in drawing out her husband's evil nature, and in stunting what little good there was in him by her perpetual encouragement of his caprices and her perpetual self-effacement. Morbidly apt at self-reproach on all other points, she never even suspected that the wreck of this man's life was partly her own doing. She accepted the consequence of her acts not as their natural punishment, but as another Heaven-sent trial to be borne without murmuring.

Among her numerous "Heaven-sent trials" was the behaviour of her three eldest sons, the first of whom had been obliged to leave the country after a detected attempt to cheat at cards. The other two were in the army, living royally beyond their means, and appearing to derive no benefit whatever from the heart-rending prayers offered up

daily, almost hourly, by their anxious mother for their welfare, temporal and spiritual.

There had been many painful scenes at the Manor-House of late between Mr. Sedley and his sons; the father refusing to pay their ever-recurring debts, while the mother prayerfully interceded on their behalf. The times were very bad just now; rents were falling, farms being given up; if things went on like this much longer, Mr. Sedley declared, they would all be in the workhouse! His own debts were steadily accumulating, but of this he said nothing to his wife. Viola was not of marriageable age, and therefore unable as yet to retrieve the family fortunes. Retrenchments became necessary, but the burden of these Mrs. Sedley took first upon her own shoulders, and then laid small hardships on her daughter, Mr. Sedley being shielded till he could be shielded no longer.

Miss Gripper, a severe maiden, who lived and did needlework in the village, used to remark upon the shabbiness of Mrs. Sedley's garments when she appeared, with Viola and her youngest son Geoffrey, in church every Sunday morning. Miss Gripper added that when Providence placed people in a certain position, it expected certain things of them; and, in *her* humble opinion, it showed a thankless, not to say an irreverent, spirit to appear in the Lord's house

Sunday after Sunday in a turned black silk,—and not such very good quality, to begin with!

Miss Gripper's feelings were threatened, as time went on, with greater and greater outrage, for the young men were going from bad to worse; yet Mrs. Sedley loved and hoped on. It was still her sons who made the most irresistible appeal to her motherly affections: the girl, beloved as she was, must always be prepared to make sacrifices for her brothers. In order that they should have a college education and every social advantage, Viola had to go almost without education at all; to afford them means to amuse themselves stylishly, their sister must be stinted of every opportunity and every pleasure. The child of course accepted this without question; her whole training dictated subordination of self, above all when the welfare of her father or her brothers was concerned. She absorbed this teaching readily, for she was her mother's ardent worshipper, and promised to be a credit to that exemplary lady.

She seemed, indeed, less bright and happy than a child ought to be, but then Mrs. Sedley laid more stress on religious and moral qualities than on mere happiness. Possibly Viola's sex made happiness seem unessential; for the mother would certainly have been much concerned had she seen one of her boys wandering about with that

wistful look in his eyes, that strange accustomed sadness which she scarcely noticed in her little girl. Yet Mrs. Sedley anticipated the troubles of her daughter's future with unspeakable dread. What had a woman to look for —a dutiful woman such as Viola must be—but sorrow and pain, increasing as her life's shadow lengthened on the dial? If not quite so heart-breaking as her mother's life had been, Viola's could not escape the doom that lurks in the air of this world for all women of her type. Indeed, for all kinds and conditions what sorrow and lamentation! For each type its peculiar miseries, but the cup for all!

There were times when Mrs. Sedley, forgetting for a moment the steadiness of her faith, felt that it might be better if the child were to pass away to another world before she had tasted the sorrows of this one. But already the childish heart had swelled with sorrowful emotion; already a dim threatening consciousness of the awful solitude of a human soul drowned in the deeps of life and eternity had raised a panic within her. She was cursed with that melancholy metaphysical consciousness of the Infinite and the Unknown with which the British mind is usually so entirely untroubled. Viola, however, was not a persistently gloomy child. When her brother Geoffrey (a boy a couple of years

her senior) came home for the holidays, she plunged heart and soul into his occupations, and was as happy as only children (and possibly angels) know how to be.

Geoffrey was a long-legged, good-hearted schoolboy, with rosy cheeks, brown eyes, and a mop-like head of fair hair. He was at Eton, acquiring a mystic thing called "tone," which evinced itself when he came home, in lively practical jokes of a most harassing character, played upon everybody within reach, without respect for age, sex, or dignity; chiefly, however, upon the maids and gardeners, who might at such times have answered Mr. Mallock's question, whether life is worth living, with a unanimous and gloomy negative.

The head-gardener, Thomas, whose mowing-machine had been put out of order, whose tools had been lost beyond recall, whose watering-pots leaked consistently, was heard to threaten to speak to Mr. Sedley if this sort of thing went on much longer. The second gardener, "Old Willum," as his chief called him, was made of softer stuff, showing lenience towards the little escapades of youth, even when Geoffrey took occasion to substitute charlock for cabbage-seed as soon as the old man's back was turned, causing the long-suffering one to sow a fine crop of that pestiferous weed in the kitchen-garden. "Old Willum,"

with his rheumatism, his patient industry, his tender old heart, was incapable of resentment.

Viola had a passionate love and pity for this old man; her eyes used to soften at the sound of his voice, at the sight of his bent figure trundling a wheelbarrow, or digging up the everlasting weeds in the gravel-terrace before the house. "Old Willum," her mother, and Geoffrey were the beings on whom she expended the treasures of her affection; on these, and on Bill Dawkins, a handsome unclipped poodle named in affectionate memory of a departed under-gardener, who had been a great favourite with the children.

Bill Dawkins was indeed an enchanting animal, ridiculously intelligent for such a world as this; a creature full of life and enterprise, true to the core, and devotedly attached to his little mistress.

He and Geoffrey used to treat her with a certain chivalrous condescension as "a weaker vessel." Bill Dawkins, in his moments of wildest excitement, would turn and run back encouragingly to see that Viola was following.

What adventures those three used to have together in the woods and fields, in the beautiful rambling old gardens of the Manor-House! And what intoxication there was

in this new-found liberty for the closely-watched, closely-guarded child !

The mere sight of the sunshine pouring down upon the open midsummer fields, the mere thrill of a bird's note, as the three companions set off together upon some wild ramble, would stir the little heart almost to bursting.

Only now and then in poetry would she find relief for this pent-up painful rapture, but books of poetry were not very plentiful at the Manor-House ; besides, Mrs. Sedley did not think any poet, except Cowper, safe reading for her daughter.

So there was nothing for it as regards expression but to run riot with Bill Dawkins over the fields, and to join in his wild, consciously fruitless chases after starlings, skylarks, or some old rook, who flapped his glossy wings in dignified retreat from the presumptuous assailant.

The child's whole heart went out in love towards the living creatures around her ; and the sight of suffering among the least of these would bring hot tears of anguish to her eyes. Things that she saw in the fields—the preying of creature upon creature, the torture suffered and inflicted in the every-day game of life,—caused her many a bitter pang, and induced her to ask questions when she went home, which Mrs. Sedley found very difficult to

answer. She generally told Viola that all things were wisely ordered, and that we must not permit a questioning spirit to grow up in us, as that would lead to doubt and sin.

So Viola was silent; but when next she saw the piteous terror of a mouse, as it awaits, horror-stricken, the spring of its captor; when next she heard the almost human scream of the hare when its doom overtakes it, she wondered as painfully as ever at the strange conflict and struggle of Nature, though she closed her lips and let the problem eat deeper and deeper into her bewildered soul.

A lake on the park boundary was the favourite haunt of this happy trio. Here in spring they would watch the frog-spawn developing into masses of wriggling tadpoles, finding never-ending interest and joy to be found in watching these Protean reptiles, who shed their frivolous tails and appeared suddenly as sedate and decorous young reptiles, wanting only size to give them that expression of unfathomable profundity, which in the full-grown frog seems to hint at wisdom greater than all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Viola used to keep some tadpoles in a water-butt behind one of the sheds in the garden, giving them romantic names, and secretly hoping that in course of time they

would answer to them. She consulted Thomas on the subject, but he shook his head with a knowing wink, and said he didn't think tadpoles took, as one might say, much notice,—not tadpoles in a ordinary way, he didn't think.

Viola urged that Marmion, the biggest of the tadpoles, used to swim to meet her when she appeared, but she observed that he did the same at the approach of Thomas, who had absolutely no sympathy with tadpole nature. To "Willum," who showed fondness for the creatures (as was only natural), they paid no special regard; they wagged their tails at everybody, and showed a great lack of discriminating power in their ceaseless exultation.

On the whole, one could enter into closer and more personal relations with their elder brothers down at the lake, only that here their vast numbers made strictly selective friendship a matter of difficulty. On one occasion, when the children were deeply engrossed in trying to persuade a green and juicy young frog to eat Albert biscuits, they looked up and beheld a young man standing beside them laughing, and a little behind him a tall lady, also laughing.

The children started up in shy alarm.

"So this is the way you two wild young people amuse

yourselves," said the lady, who was no stranger, but the children's aunt Augusta, one of Mr. Sedley's sisters, who had married and settled at Upton, a village about twelve miles from the Manor-House.

She was an important, self-possessed-looking woman, tall and thin, with dark eyes, hair, and complexion, a long face, rather thin lips, and a neat compact brow.

Her face expressed her character pretty accurately.

Harry Lancaster, her present companion, used to say of her that she had enough will-power to drive a steam-engine, an unassailable self-confidence, and opinions of cast-iron.

She was an ambitious woman, whose ambitions had been gratified by her marriage with Lord Clevedon, a courtly person of the old school, with whom she had really fallen in love after a fashion, perhaps because he satisfied her innate desire for all that is dignified and grandiose.

Harry Lancaster was a slim, boyish-looking, brown-haired fellow, with a frank humorous face, whose charm lay chiefly in its expression. His dark bluish-grey eyes were brimming over with amusement and sympathy, as he stood with folded arms looking down upon the two shame-faced children.

"It seems ages since I saw you, my dears," said Aunt Augusta, in her clear self-confident accents. "Are you never

coming to see me and your cousins again? Percy was asking after you only this morning, and little Augusta too. I think I must carry you off with me to-day after lunch, no matter what your mother says. My good sister-in-law thinks me too frivolous a person to trust her chicks to," she added to Harry, with a laugh.

"And so you are," said Harry. "I have had serious thoughts of leaving your hospitable roof because I find your influence morally deleterious."

"Impertinent boy! And before these children too! My dears, you must always put cotton-wool in your ears when this wicked cousin of mine speaks. He is a very dreadful young man, I must tell you—the most dreadful thing under the sun: a Radical!"

"What is a Radical?" asked Geoffrey, looking up into the face of the "dreadful thing," which smiled amiably.

"A creature in the form of a human being, but with the soul of a demon," answered Lady Clevedon. "I don't know if he feeds upon little children, but he certainly devours widows' houses."

The children stared.

"After dark," pursued her Ladyship, "he becomes phosphorescent, and emits from his mouth and nostrils green fire."

Geoffrey laughed at this in a sceptical manner.

"It's all very well to laugh," said his aunt, "but you don't know what a dangerous young man it is! Let us stroll back together to the house, and I will try to get your mother's permission to take you home with me."

A visit to Clevedon was like a visit to a fairy palace, and the children followed their aunt and her talkative companion across the park, with hearts beating high for pleasure.

Mrs. Sedley was inclined, as usual, to find some reason against their going, but her husband interposed. Through his sister he hoped some day to find a wealthy husband for his daughter.

"Take them, my dear, take them," he said graciously.

The neighbouring estate to that of Lord Clevedon had just been inherited by a distant relation of the late owner, who was without sons or nephews, and this new Sir Philip Dendraith had a young son who would be just the right age for Viola when they both grew up, and who would also be one of the most eligible young men in the county.

"It will do the children a world of good to have a little outing," said Mr. Sedley cheerfully.

He was a big, thick-set man, with a ruddy face, reddish hair, and rather bleared light blue eyes. There was a cer-

tain jauntiness about his manner, and he was a notorious flirt; though, as his sister very frankly remarked, "no clever woman could ever be got to flirt with him; he was not amusing enough."

"Have you seen anything of your new neighbours?" Mr. Sedley inquired, as the little party sat down to lunch in the big, dull, old-fashioned dining-room of the Manor-House.

"Sir Philip Dendraith and his family? No; at least I have seen Sir Philip and his son at a meet of the Upton hounds, but I have not yet called on his wife. He is an appalling creature; loud, pushing, altogether obnoxious. It is a sad pity that the main branch of the family died out; this man is not fit for the position."

"And the son?" inquired Mr. Sedley.

"Ah! he is of quite a different stamp; a true Dendraith; handsome, polished, keen-witted. He reminds me of that portrait of Andrew Dendraith at the old castle on the cliff, the man in the last century who was said to have killed his wife because he discovered she was in love with another man."

"Handsome, then?" said Mr. Sedley.

"Wonderfully handsome," Lady Clevedon answered. "Of course his parents are crazily fond of him."

"Ah! I suppose you will call at once at Upton Court."

Lady Clevedon shrugged her shoulders.

"My instinct is to put off the evil day."

"Bad habit, putting off!" said Mr. Sedley, sagely, at which his sister gave a sardonic chuckle. Perhaps she was thinking of Mr. Sedley's debts!

After luncheon the two children were taken off to the "Palace of Delight." Harry Lancaster entertained them during the twelve miles' drive with a running stream of fantastic talk. Lady Clevedon sat back in the carriage and quietly laughed at him, while Harry, on his side, seemed to be amusing himself in a sort of secret sub-fashion with the rest of the company, and with the entire situation.

He was one of those happy people to whom life is always more or less amusing, and this pleasant sensation became particularly keen when he was visiting his "baronial cousin," as he called her.

Most people were frightened of Lady Clevedon, who was noted for her powers of satire, but Harry bared his head to the storm, and its lightnings played about him harmlessly. She liked his audacity, even when he attacked her most cherished convictions. With all his boldness and freedom, he was what she was pleased to call a "gentleman," a title

which she bestowed or withheld with a discrimination sometimes a little arbitrary.

"I wish I knew what you mean by 'gentleman,'" Harry said, after some unoffending person had been consigned to the region of outer darkness, where there are no gentlemen, but only weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. "I think you are inclined (perhaps we all are) to make the word stand for a certain sublime something which we mix up in a glow of excitement with qualities purely social."

"My dear boy, we are not all etymological dictionaries; we use words in their ordinary accepted sense, and leave definitions to—'the Unemployed.'"

"But," persisted Harry, "I want to know what *is* meant in common parlance by a 'gentleman.'"

"Ask me to express one of the 'ultimate elements' (which you are always prosily talking about) in terms of something else," returned her Ladyship.

"Ah! that's an idea!" Harry exclaimed joyously. "A gentleman is a social *element;* he can't be reduced to any lower terms; he is among the original bricks of which the universe is built; he is fundamental, indestructible, inconceivable, and"——

"Harry, is *nothing* sacred to you? Does this horrible

Radicalism sweep away all the traditions that you learnt at your mother's knee?"

"Far from it," said Harry. "Although I have no respect for class, and no reverence for rank, I still realise that the house of Lancaster stands apart from and above all principalities and powers, and that it is more glorious in its fall than ever it was in the palmiest days of its prosperity."

"You don't deserve to belong to it!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon. "This virus of democracy has poisoned your whole system."

"Democracy—what is democracy?" questioned Harry, pensively.

"The misgovernment of fools by madmen!" she returned.

He smiled. "'You murder with a definition!'"

"I am sick of the nonsense that people talk now-a-days, calling themselves 'advanced,'" Lady Clevedon pursued;—"advanced in folly, let me tell them! Every shallow idiot with a clapper in his head thinks himself entitled to get up and make a jangle like any chapel-bell that whitens one's hair on Sunday mornings!"

"Use Mrs. Allen's hair-restorer," suggested Harry frivolously.

Lady Clevedon's face changed.

"Harry," she cried impressively, "there was a young man in ancient mythology of very good position, but he succeeded in rendering himself so obnoxious to the gods by his inveterate habit of making fun of them, that he at last got turned out of heaven. That young man's name was Momus."

"Unhappy Momus!" said Harry. "Do you chance to know any of the fatal jokes by which he lost his place among the Olympians?"

Lady Clevedon laughed.

"Much use it is to point a moral for *your* benefit, young man."

"Perhaps he chaffed Jupiter about his love-affairs, by Jove!"

"I dare say; he was a vulgar god. But be good enough to suit your conversation to these children."

"I am sure they are interested in Momus," said Harry. "The question you raise is one of extreme significance,—is it not so, Viola? I am sure you feel with me that the first instance of vulgarity on record is a subject of reflection for a philosopher."

"Harry, Harry!"

"One of the profoundest mysteries of the universe, my dear cousin; the bane of philosophy, the despair of religion,

the insuperable obstacle to the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and the"——

"Harry, if you talk any more nonsense I shall stop the carriage, and leave you ignominiously on the road."

"Well, well;—perhaps the day will yet come when I shall be taken at my true worth."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon as they drove through the gates of her domain; "that would be a punishment greater than you could bear!"

He made a grimace.

"To a woman I must not grudge the last word," he said.

His cousin laughed.

"When a man begins to give points to his adversary on account of her sex, the adversary may hoist the flag of victory."

"Take it," he said, "take it and be thankful!"

Clevedon was a large ugly block of building, standing upon a raised plateau, whence the land sloped majestically towards the park.

The faces of the two children grew eager as the great white house appeared in sight. The carriage having been dismissed, Aunt Augusta proposed a stroll till Percy and his sister should return from their ride. Meanwhile the

children might gather some hothouse flowers to take back to their mother.

"What a fine old place this is, in its own way!" Harry observed, as they wended their steps to the garden; "it is so gentlemanly, so"——

"Harry! There was a young man in ancient mythology called"——

"Nay, so stately, so calm, so well-bred; so smooth and blandly expansive," pursued Harry, in language which would have pleased Quintilian, who always regarded as hopeful those pupils whose literary productions required pruning, rather than the young proficients whose style at the beginning showed the delicate reticence of maturity.

"I like the place; I am not going to have it scoffed at," said Aunt Augusta.

"Scoffed at! I am admiring it. Scoffed at! Why, I have a friendly feeling towards every nook and corner of it. I like it, I love it; but—it amuses me!"

"An incorrigible Momus!" cried Lady Clevedon.

"It is perfect," he broke out again. "I am sure Geoffrey and Viola agree with me that it is perfect."

"You bewilder these poor children, Harry."

"Just run your eye round the four quarters of the

heavens. Could anything be more dignified? I repeat my question, Viola—could anything be more dignified?

She shyly shook her head.

"No; nothing could be more dignified! Look how the land spreads out round the mansion, in a sort of liberal manner, as if it would say: I am at your entire disposal; pray take as much of me as you please, there is no stint; be expansive; the more so the better; you have only to mention the quantity, and it is yours!

"Then observe what a benign and courteous sweep leads the eye from the terrace-level to the park. No abrupt lines there; your very curves are baronial! And your cattle! What an air of conscious worth! what splendour of outline and richness of colour! what harmony of action! what a Highland fling of movement! what"——

"If you make fun of my husband's Highland cattle, he'll never forgive you: better make fun of ME than that. Come, don't dawdle so; you are getting too garrulous."

But change of scene proved no check to his eloquence.

"There is nothing in the world to beat an old English garden," he exclaimed, rhetorically. "What sweet and lazy influences linger in the air by fern-fringed walls! what indolent joys exhale from flower-borders where violets and

precocious primroses offer themselves to be cherished—it is as if one had found a new world!"

Viola looked up at him wonderingly, while Geoffrey, forgetting his shyness, suddenly began to talk—chiefly about rabbits and pistols and repeating-rifles. Then they all went into the hothouses, and came out laden with delicate sweetly-scented flowers, which Viola touched with ecstatic and reverent fingers.

The children were allowed to amuse themselves as they pleased, while Aunt Augusta and her talkative cousin strolled on together.

"Harry," she said, after a few minutes of desultory conversation, "have you given up that mad idea of yours yet?"

"About music?" His face changed and saddened. "I cannot cure myself of the mad idea. Meanwhile, of course, I retain my commission," he added, rather bitterly.

"The sooner you cure yourself the better. As a musician you would starve. Besides, how do you know you have enough talent to"——

"I know nothing at all about my talents—(pardon me for interrupting); I only know that failure in that pursuit would be sweeter to me than success in any other."

"Foolish boy!"

"Now, Augusta, what do you mean? How often have you preached to me against doing things by halves; how often have you pierced with ridicule men who 'took up' a thing, and tinkled amiably upon some instrument, or made smudges on clean paper,—any one, in short, who tried to imitate the last stage of an art without laying the foundations. You said it was like the attempt of a builder to roof a house that wasn't built."

"Well?"

"Well! why not build the house from the foundation?"

"Why not go and starve?" she inquired. "Go and starve to slow music?"

Harry paused for a moment, looking at her; and then, with one of his sudden inconsistent actions, he lifted his stick on to the tip of his first finger, balanced it there for a moment skilfully, and shot it up far and swift towards the sky. It rose, like a rocket, and came down again at a little distance into a gooseberry-bed.

"Take care that is not *your* fate," said Lady Clevedon.

"It must have been splendid going up," Harry returned; "and what a 'fine rapture' when it had risen to its utmost and felt the heavens above, and the earth widen beneath it"——

"And how exhilarating when it felt itself in the gooseberry-bed!"

"There are many sticks rotting in the gooseberry-bed that have never known the upper air at all," Harry observed; "they have secured themselves against all risk of downfall by prudently taking the lowest place."

"Like the Unjust Steward," suggested Lady Clevedon, whose Scripture was weak.

"Or the rebellious angels," added Harry, with a laugh.

He picked up a mouldering apple-twig and held it out to his cousin to consider.

"Observe, it is damp and brittle; I can snap it anywhere, for it has not the toughness of life in it. Lichen grows upon it, and unwholesome moss, and it is teeming with crawling and creeping things,—shall I show you?"

"Be good enough to keep away," cried the lady hastily.

"They are skurrying about in great agitation; they can't imagine what has happened. They are telling one another that they *knew* how it would be all along, and that if only *their* advice had been listened to"——

"D—a—m!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon, spelling the word (after her own fashion) as a concession to public sentiment, "here are Sir Philip Dendraith and his incomparable son! What effrontery to come here before we

have called at Upton Court! I shall make him pay for this!"

Sir Philip Dendraith was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a hooked nose, high cheek-bones, sharp little blue eyes, and a grey beard, which retained signs of having once been reddish in tint. The younger Philip resembled his father scarcely at all; he was a slim, dark-haired youth, with face and figure almost faultless. Harry Lancaster, flinging away the decayed apple-twig, stood watching him with sudden intentness, while Lady Clevedon, donning her stiffest air, awaited the approach of the visitors. They raised their hats.

"Pardon our intrusion," Sir Philip called out in loud self-confident tones; "we were taking a walk across country and lost our way"——

"So I observe," said her Ladyship.

"Got into your park through the bit of woodland by the roadside down yonder, and found ourselves in the gardens before we knew where we were. Lady Clevedon, I presume?"

She bowed.

"Not——?" with an interrogative glance at Harry.

"Not," she repeated conclusively.

"Ah!" observed Sir Philip, throwing himself back and looking round, "charming garden you have here."

"I am glad it pleases you."

"Oh, vastly, vastly; fine old place altogether."

Lady Clevedon stood waiting.

"Ah!" cried Sir Philip, descrying Viola and Geoffrey in the distance, "your children, no doubt?"

"No," she said, "not my children."

"Perhaps Lady Clevedon would be so kind as to mention which is the shortest way out of her domain," interposed Philip Dendraith the younger; "we have intruded long enough."

"Allow me to come with you; it is not easy to find the road unassisted," said Harry.

Sir Philip, apparently much against his will, was then hurried off by his son under Harry's escort.

"I trust we shall shortly renew our acquaintance," he said in parting; "near neighbours, like ourselves, should make a point of being friendly."

Again Lady Clevedon frigidly bowed.

As the three arrived at the end of the path they came upon Geoffrey and Viola peering curiously into some hot-beds.

"*Not* Lady Clevedon's children?" repeated Sir Philip.

"No; her nephew and niece," said Harry.

"Nice little girl!" observed Philip the younger. "Fine eyes."

She flushed up, and took a step backwards.

"Let me see what colour they are."

She shut the lids tightly and covered her face.

"Oh! unkind little girl! I shall tell your mamma," said Philip teasingly.

"Oh! no, no, *no!*" she cried, with unexpected terror; "*please* don't tell her."

"Is the mamma so formidable? Well, then, let me see your pretty eyes, and I promise not to tell how unkind you were."

But at this Viola again fell back, with a look of strange distress, whereupon Harry took her hand and said soothingly, "Never mind, Viola; this gentleman was only joking; he won't tell your mother, if you don't wish it."

He was holding open the garden-door as he spoke.

On the threshold Philip stopped, looked over his shoulder, and kissed the tips of his fingers gallantly.

"Nut-brown maid, farewell!" he said, and passed through with a laugh.

"Come on, Viola; let's go with them," cried Geoffrey, taking her hand; "he's rather a lark, that fellow."

But Viola passionately flung him off, and before he realised what had happened the child had run to the farther end of the garden.

"Rum things girls!" was Geoffrey's comment as he pursued his new-found hero and philosophically left the eternal riddle to solve itself among the gooseberry-bushes.

When Harry returned after conducting the trespassers into the Upton road, he found his cousin in a very bad temper.

"Intolerable creature!" she broke out. "Where can he have sprung from, with his voice and his manners? 'Fine place' indeed! Impertinent upstart! You were asking what a gentleman is, Harry; well, I can tell you what a gentleman is *not*:—Sir Philip Dendraith."

"Tactless person, certainly; and rather uncouth. The father and son are a curious contrast, are they not?"

"Most extraordinary! That boy is a Dendraith all over. Fine-looking lad."

"A gentleman, I suppose?" said Harry.

"Every inch!"

"I thought so. Well, as a mere *man*, give me that 'lumbering wain,' his father; more qualities to rely upon there; more common but cosy humanness. There is something polished and cold-blooded about that young Adonis, with his white teeth, that gives me a shiver

all up my spine. It is astonishing how insolent polished people can be."

"The Dendraiths always were a little cold-blooded," said Lady Clevedon, "and a little over clever. It is *not* human to be very clever; one cannot disguise that fact."

CHAPTER III.

PHILIP DENDRAITH.

Sir Philip Dendraith, by a sudden turn of fortune's wheel, had been hoisted out of obscure and somewhat speculative spheres into the pure white light of what Harry Lancaster had called in his haste "landed propriety."

He was related to the last owner of the Dendraith estate through his mother's family, a fact which he had enjoyed and made much use of in his former existence, having a highly developed instinct of adoration for social pre-eminence, and a ferret's keenness in routing out unwilling relatives, lofty and far-removed, but profitable.

"My cousin, Sir John Dendraith," might have fallen from his dying lips in those prehistoric days when he owned to the solid and simple name of Thompson, and used to wander with his wife and son from small furnished house to smaller furnished house, where crochet antimacassars and crystal lustres gave the keynote to existence.

In those dark ages Mr. Thompson used to be always launching ideas which required capital and a company—brilliant ideas that only wanted carrying out, such as a method of blacking boots by machinery, patent umbrellas that opened automatically on being held upright, and folded up again when their position was reversed (facetious friends used to say that they even buttoned and unbuttoned themselves as occasion required). There were ingenious hooks and eyes that never came undone until their owner desired it, and then yielded without a struggle; coal-scuttles which made the putting on of coal a positive luxury to a sensitive invalid,—and other wonderful inventions, not to speak of the celebrated millennium double-action roller-blind, whose tassel could under no circumstances come off in the hand, and which never acquired the habit of rolling up askew and remaining blocked in a slanting and crazy position half-way up the window. As for his mowing-machine, and his instrument for putting out fires in their most advanced stages, a child might use them.

Philip Thompson was endeavouring to increase his small income by bringing some of these valuable ideas into notice, when one morning, to his infinite surprise, he awoke and found himself Sir Philip Dendraith; that is to say, he

was informed that, by a most extraordinary series of events, he had become the next heir to the Dendraith estates, and it was hoped that he would assume the family name.

This he lost no time in doing, and with the name of Thompson he put away also things Thompsonian; his patent umbrellas and coal-scuttles; and now only his plump, simple-minded wife took any pride or interest in these once absorbing themes.

The social world was to this fortune-favoured man the only and the best of all possible worlds; to rise in it his sole ambition. With this object the family had always conscientiously kept *something* beyond their means, whether (said Lady Clevedon) it were a phæton or a footman, or merely a titled relative, stuffed and cured, to stand picturesquely in the middle distance and be alluded to. This, she added profanely, was of more value than many footmen.

Her inclination had been to remain unaware of the existence of the new baronet, but this idea was more easily conceived than carried out.

When a church-bell clangs loudly every Sunday morning close to your ears, philosophy counsels that you take no notice of the barbarism, but human frailty may nevertheless succumb.

Sir Philip had entered upon his new sphere in high good

spirits, determined to enjoy all that it offered to the full, and to take his place among his peers with a dash and style that would make him known and respected throughout the country.

There was no escaping him. Like a teasing east wind that blows low, he met one round every corner, blustered against one at every turn, let one face north, south, east, or west in fruitless attempt at evasion. Perhaps Lady Clevedon, who could turn things social into ridicule cleverly enough, but to whom social laws were nevertheless indisputable, felt all along that there was no escaping the acquaintance of Philip Dendraith, be he mad, drunk, or a fiend in human shape; and she finally, in no very affable mood, drove over and called at Upton Court.

Lady Dendraith's plump good-nature much amused her visitor, and the latter came back disposed to be friendly towards the simple old person who was full of innocent pride in her husband and son, as well as brimming over with naïve astonishment at the sudden change in their fortunes.

"After lodgings and furnished houses, a place like this does seem wonderfully palatial; but my husband and son take to it as if they had been here all their lives, bless their hearts!"

"Bless *your* heart, old lady!" thought the visitor, who was forgiving to any one who amused her. "If ever there was a good old soul you are that person, my dear!"

As for Lord Clevedon, he regarded his new neighbour with the highest disfavour, though he too recognised the duty of knowing a Dendraith, in whatever stage of mental or moral decomposition he might chance to be.

"The fellow has none of the real Dendraith blood in him," he said; "it was a sad pity that the old stock died out!"

"Have you seen the son?" asked Lady Clevedon.

Her husband straightened his thin figure, and drawing his head out of his necktie and collar, gave it a twist as if he had half a mind to unscrew the thing and take it down for closer examination—perhaps under the impression that the machinery wanted oiling.

"Yes, I have seen the son."

"Not like either of his parents, I think. Did he not strike you as being very like that portrait at the old house on the cliff of Andrew Dendraith?—the man that had such an extraordinary story, you know. I think he used to take opium among other things, and was suspected of having murdered his wife—though nobody could ever prove it. He was a man of considerable power, but I don't fancy he

minded the precepts he used to write in his copy-books as he might have done."

"The fellow was no credit to his relations," said Lord Clevedon, screwing his head on again as a hopeless case (the works required a thorough cleaning, and he didn't see his way to getting it done).

"Andrew Dendraith," he continued, "was one of the bad characters that seem to crop up in the family now and again, as if there were some evil strain in it not to be overcome."

"It is curious that this young Philip should be so like Andrew," said Lady Clevedon; "the relationship is not very close, but the resemblance, to my mind, is striking. In figure they are alike; this boy is tall and slim and well put together, as Andrew was, and he has the same cold, keen, handsome face, with perfect, clean-cut features, and already there is plenty of control over the muscles. His manners are polished—too polished for his age, almost; though perhaps one fancies that, through seeing him beside his awful father, who really"——

"Who, upon my honour"—— assisted Lord Clevedon.

"Is likely to give the county a severe fit of social indigestion," concluded his wife.

However, the county gulped him down; and though it

suffered from a pain in the chest, it did its duty to the new representative of the Dendraiths, calling upon his wife with exemplary punctuality.

Mrs. Sedley, among the rest, wearily set out to perform her task. She put on her best bonnet, provided herself with a card-case, and ordered the carriage.

No one ever quite knew if that old vehicle would hold together for another drive, but the family seemingly meant to go on paying its calls in it, till the faithful servant "died in harness," as Harry Lancaster used to say, with characteristic fondness for incongruous metaphors.

Geoffrey saw the old chariot at the door, and rushed in to ask if he and Viola might accompany their mother.

"And Bill Dawkins," added Viola.

"What larks if we break down on the road!" cried Geoffrey.

However, no such lively calamity occurred; they rumbled respectably along the high-road and through the little villages, Bill Dawkins behaving with the utmost decorum on the back-seat beside Geoffrey; so much so, in fact, that Viola was afraid he would get tired—whereat her brother jeered.

"Bill Dawkins isn't a *girl!*" he cried scornfully. "Are you, Bill?" at which compliment the poodle thumped his tail upon the carriage-cushion and cast down his eyes.

Sir Philip, coming down the avenue of Upton Court, met the carriage driving up. Viola and Geoffrey recognised him and looked at one another.

If Lady Clevedon or Harry Lancaster had been present, they would have derived much gratification from the sight of the meeting between Mrs. Sedley and her new neighbour.

Sir Philip raised his hat gallantly and gave a loud shout of welcome.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sedley? Going to call on the old lady? That's right; she's just having a nap,—rather a weakness of Lady Dendraith's—afternoon naps."

"I fear we shall disturb her," said Mrs. Sedley in her steady, shy, withdrawn tones.

"Dear me, no, not at all; she will be delighted, I assure you. We were wondering we hadn't seen anything of you before. However, better late than never. Family cares, I daresay. These your chicks? Halloa! why, these are the two children I saw at Clevedon! Lady Clevedon's nephew and niece, of course. Well, my boy, can you conjugate your τυπτω, or do you spend all your time and brains on old Father Thames? You must make friends with *my* boy, though he is some years older than you; he can conjugate you anything you like, I can tell you. The young people are getting so clever nowadays, there's no holding them.

I see the little girl has had the good taste to copy her mother,". Sir Philip continued, chucking Viola under the chin. "Couldn't have had a better model, my dear. Will you give me a kiss?" he asked, bending down without waiting for permission.

"No, I won't," said the child, shrinking away from him and squeezing Bill Dawkins uncomfortably close to the farther side of the carriage.

Sir Philip laughed.

"Ah! you don't care to kiss an old man like me!"

"No, I *don't* want to kiss you!" said Viola irately. Bill Dawkins barked.

"Viola, dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Sedley, at which a look of intense trouble came into the child's face. If her mother's sacred wishes and her own feelings should now come into open conflict, there would blaze up a small Hell in that childish breast; for, trivial as the occasion seemed to grown-up consciousness, the intensity of feeling that it called out is impossible to represent, much more to exaggerate.

"Come now, I *must* have a kiss," said Sir Philip in a playful manner, and going round to the other side of the carriage. "If you give me a kiss, I'll give you a sweetmeat when we get up to the house; there's a bargain now!"

"I don't want sweatmeats—I don't want sweetmeats," cried Viola, darting away again in increased dislike as Sir Philip's bearded face appeared beside her.

"She does not need any reward for behaving politely, I am sure," said Mrs. Sedley. "Viola, dearest, you will give this gentleman a kiss when he asks you to do so."

The child's eyes fixed themselves in silent desperation on the ground. Her face became white and set.

"That's a good little girl," said Sir Philip. "I am sure we shall soon be excellent friends, for I am very fond of children. Now for my kiss."

He bent forward to take it, when Viola, with a suppressed cry, wildly plunged off the seat to the bottom of the carriage and hid her face in the rug. Upon this Bill Dawkins became violently excited, alternately jumping down to thrust his nose against Viola's hair, and springing on to the seat to bark persistently in Sir Philip's face, getting more and more enraged as that gentleman threw back his head and laughed heartily, with the remark that he had never been treated so unkindly by a lady before.

"Well, I suppose I must give it up for the present," he said. "If you will drive on to the house, Mrs. Sedley, I will return with you."

"Oh! please don't let us bring you in," began the

visitor, but Sir Philip drowned her remonstrance, and directed the coachman to drive on.

He met the carriage at the door, and helped Mrs. Sedley to alight.

Bill Dawkins sprang out with a yelp of joy, followed by Geoffrey. On the steps stood Philip Dendraith the younger.

"Now then, little woman," said Sir Philip kindly enough, as Viola held back, with defiant eyes. "Come along."

"Come on, Ila, you young silly!" urged her brother. "He doesn't want to kiss you now."

Sir Philip leant across the carriage with a laugh, upon which the child, making a violent effort to escape, flung herself against the door at the farther side, and fell, hurting her head and arm. In falling she had moved the handle of the door, which suddenly burst open.

"Good heavens! save her!" cried Sir Philip.

Before the words were out of his mouth his son, with marvellous rapidity, had darted round just in time to rescue the child from a dangerous fall. Her body was half out of the carriage when he caught her in his arms and carried her quickly into the house, where he laid her on a sofa and summoned his mother to the rescue. Mrs. Sedley had, fortunately, not seen the accident.

"Poor dear little creature!" cried the good Lady Dendraith, who had just been roused from her "nap," "are you much hurt, my dear? I think not, for she doesn't cry at all."

"She never cries," said her mother, shaking her head; "she is like a little woman when she hurts herself."

"Dear, dear!—what would she like, I wonder?—some brandy and water to revive her, and perhaps she ought to see the doctor."

But Mrs. Sedley thought that she could easily manage with the help of a few simple remedies. Viola appeared to have been rather startled than really hurt. She lay quite quiet, but with an anxious, watchful look in her eyes, which changed to something approaching terror when Sir. Philip's loud voice was heard in the hall.

She started up.

"Don't let that man come in; don't let him come in!" she cried wildly.

Lady Dendraith looked surprised, and Mrs. Sedley naturally felt uncomfortable.

"Hush, Viola dear, nobody will disturb you; you should not speak so, you know; it is not like a little lady."

"I don't want to be like a little lady!" cried Viola, who seemed to be in a strange state of excitement.

"I think," said Mrs. Sedley, "that I ought to take her

home at once, though I am sorry to cut short my visit to you, Lady Dendraith; and I am most grateful for your kindness to my little girl."

When Mrs. Sedley said she would go she always went without delay, and Viola having shaken hands with her hostess (she refused to kiss her, though without impolite remarks), returned to the carriage on foot, looking behind her in a frightened manner lest her *bête noire* should be present.

He was standing in the entrance when they went out, and expressed much concern at the shortness of the visit. Viola shrank away to the other side of her mother.

"Well, young lady, I am glad to see you are all right again. Upon my honour, you sent my heart into my mouth when you burst that door open! What a fierce little maiden it is! I hope you won't treat your lovers in this fashion in the time to come, or you will have much to answer for."

Mrs. Sedley, objecting to have Viola spoken to about lovers, cut the conversation short by shaking hands with her host once more and entering the carriage.

"No, I am not going to ask for a kiss now," said Sir Philip, as Viola shrank away hastily, "but I think my son, who saved you from a severe accident, deserves one; and

you won't mind kissing *him*, though you are so unkind to his poor old father."

"I don't want to kiss anybody as long as I live!" cried Viola. "I hate everybody; I"—— She broke down with sheer passion.

Father and son burst out laughing, and Philip, bending down, lifted her swiftly in his arms, quietly kissed her in spite of her violent resistance, and placed her in the carriage beside the poodle, who received her with acclamation. She struck her laughing enemy with her clenched fist, and then flinging herself against the cushions, hid her face, drawing up the rug over her head, and burst into low heart-broken sobs.

"Viola, Viola!" in tones of surprised remonstrance from Mrs. Sedley.

The carriage rolled away down the avénue and emerged into the bare down country, but the child did not stir. Mrs. Sedley was afraid that this unwonted excitement might be the precursor of some illness, and thought it wiser not to interfere except by a few soothing words.

Geoffrey showed a boyish inclination to laugh at his sister for making such a fuss about nothing, but his mother reproved him, as it seemed to make her more excited.

Bill Dawkins was greatly concerned about her. He

searched her out among the rugs, as if he were hunting for rats, and expressed his sympathy with wistful eloquence. Once she put her arm round his neck and drew him to her passionately, and if it had not been for his thick coat, the good poodle might have felt some hot tears falling on his shaggy head.

Viola did not recover her spirits all that day. Mrs. Sedley watched her anxiously, and sent her to bed early, with compresses on her arm and a bandage on her head.

When all was quiet, and Viola found herself alone, she crept out of bed, went to the window and drew up the blind. There stood the avenue, stately and beautiful in the moonlight, wreathed with mists.

The vision brought the tears welling up again from the depths of the child's wounded soul. Her grief was all the bitterer because she could not express it in words even to herself; she could only feel over and over again, with all a child's intensity, that she had been treated with insolence, as a being whose will was of no moment, whose very person was not her own; who might be kissed or struck or played with exactly as people pleased, as if she were a thing without life or personality. Her sense of individual dignity—singularly strong in this child—was outraged, and she felt as if she could never forgive or forget the insult as long as

she lived. The jocular good-natured way in which it had been offered made it only the more unbearable.

"I hate you; I *hate*," cried Viola, mentally apostrophising her enemies, "I hate everybody in the world—except mother and Bill Dawkins."

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CHAPTER IV.

RELIGIOUS DIFFICULTIES.

As soon as her children had acquired enough cohesion to sit upon a pew-seat, Mrs. Sedley had taken them to church. Sometimes, indeed, she had been too hasty and taken them almost before that epoch, so that the hapless little beings used to crumple up and slip to the ground, keeping their mother occupied in gathering and replacing them during the service.

Among Viola's earliest remembrances were these miniature declines and falls, which had generally been occasioned by her being painfully tired during the early part of the service through the dire necessity of sitting still, and by the sleepy exhaustion produced at last by an infinite number of suppressed desires; among them a very vivid longing to stroke the sealskin jacket of the former Lady Dendraith who used to sit in the pew just in front of her. Once, in fact, watching her opportunity with beating heart, she had actually realised her soul's ambition by drawing her little

hand timidly down from Lady Dendraith's shoulders to her waist, and then leaving off in a panic on hearing a smothered chuckle from one of her too wide-awake brothers.

These delinquents took a special delight in leading her into mischief during service. The pew was large, and ran in two directions at right angles to one another, so that there was one part of it quite out of Mrs. Sedley's range of vision, where unholy deeds might be wrought.

Here they would pelt one another with catapults, or build a Tower of Babel out of prayer-books; the stately edifice almost reaching to the top of the pew. (It was one of Harry Lancaster's wicked sayings, that Mrs. Sedley was going to mount into heaven upon a staircase of these volumes, and it must be admitted that the number of her books of devotion was exciting to the profane imagination.)

Viola characteristically took all things connected with religion in grim earnest. Her after-pangs of remorse, if she had taken too much interest in the Tower of Babel, were very keen, and she often suffered indescribable terrors from the conviction that her sins would be punished in the fires of hell. Sometimes she experienced strange emotional upliftings, when she believed that she felt the very presence of Christ, and a passionate inspiration for a life devoted

only to His service. And then would follow days of fruitless effort to keep up to the level of these moments of ecstasy.

On Sunday afternoons it was Mrs. Sedley's custom to read the Bible with the two children, taking them into her own sitting-room (*boudoir* is a term inconsistent with this lady), and closing the door after her with a quiet solemnity which to Viola had something of awful sacredness.

Geoffrey, alas! had been known to whistle a secular melody after that ceremony of initiation, and it was a common amusement with him to secretly alter all the markers in his mother's Bible and "Daily Meditations," or to place them against chapters in the Old Testament which consisted chiefly of proper names, because his mother found some difficulty in pronouncing them.

After the reading the children were allowed to express their ideas upon what they had heard, and to ask a few questions. Geoffrey always took a morbid interest in Satan, and (Satan being a biblical character) Mrs. Sedley could not consistently refuse to gratify it. His questions were of a nature to whiten the hair of an orthodox mother!

Viola's difficulties were of another kind. She could not understand the stories of holy treachery and slaughter

related of the children of Israel, in whose wanderings she and her brother always took the keenest interest. It was an actual grief to her when her heroes suddenly broke away from a most well-ordered and respectable career to go forth, like a swarm of hornets, to injure and destroy. That "the Lord commanded them" only made the matter darker. Mrs. Sedley could not enter into these difficulties. She herself would not have hurt the poor fly, which appears to be regarded as the last creature entitled to human mercy (unless, perhaps, it interrupted her prayers or distracted her attention from holy things); but she entirely approved of the wholesale massacres perpetrated by the chosen people in the name of the Lord, and considered that His name was greatly glorified thereby.

Viola was also disturbed by the strange story about Balaam when he was sent for by Balak to come and "curse him" the Israelites. "God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him: If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them: but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do."

So Balaam naturally goes.

Then, to Viola's infinite bewilderment, "God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him."

The child's face of dismay at this apparent instance of Divine inconsistency would have been comic had it not been piteous.

"But why was God angry when He had told Balaam the night before to go with the men if they came to call him?"

Mrs. Sedley first said that "the ways of Providence were past finding out," but remembering that her sister-in-law had once burst into a fit of immoderate laughter at this reply, she suggested that the Lord had possibly meant to try Balaam's faithfulness.

She never noticed in her younger pupil the hungry desire to find something that she could worship, the piteous efforts of the tender-hearted child to adore the God who sent forth the Israelites to smite whole races with the edge of the sword, and to leave not one remaining of the people.

Fortunately the New Testament was read on alternate Sundays, and if to love Christ be the one thing needful for salvation, Viola certainly fulfilled the condition. She was an enthusiastic little Christian, though there were yet many flaws in her orthodoxy which her mother had to patch up as best she might.

Being made sound on one side, she was apt to give way

on the other, causing poor Mrs. Sedley much trouble, and demanding more mental agility than she possessed. How God could be willing to accept the pain and grief of one divine being as a substitute for the pain and grief of other guilty beings was what Viola could not understand. If the guilt could pass away from the guilty at all, how should God let the burden of it rest on some one else, as if God were greedy of pain for His creatures, and could not forgive generously and entirely? It was like the story of the young prince who, when he was naughty, had a little slave beaten in his stead, quite to the satisfaction of the royal father. Religious difficulties began early in Viola's experience, as probably they do in most essentially religious natures. Doctrine and dogma and commentary were provided for her so liberally, that, as Wilkins the coachman technically remarked, "It was enough to give the poor child a surfeit." Thomas, with his practical instincts, "didn't see no sense in cramming a lot o' religion into a young lady with Miss Viola's prospects, *he* didn't—not a lot o' fancy stuff of Mrs. Sedley's makin' up, as drawed down the face till it was as long as a 'olly'ock: and never a smile or a 'good-day' to a soul about the place—he didn't see what good come of such religion, *he* didn't." And Thomas shoved his spade into the earth with a vigour

corresponding to the vigour of his conviction that if *he* could see no use in a thing, use in it there could not possibly be.

When Geoffrey was away (and this, of course, was during the greater part of the year) Viola led a strange, lonely life. She had no companions, Mrs. Sedley being afraid to let her associate much with her cousins at Clevedon, because their training was, in her opinion, so godless.

Viola's education was of the simplest character. Her mother gave her lessons in history, geography, and arithmetic every morning after the usual Bible-reading and prayer, and as she grew older Viola had to practise her music for an hour every afternoon. Music being one of her passions, the hour, in spite of its drudgery, had its charms. The piano was in the drawing-room, a large dreary, dimly-lighted dungeon, which chilled the very marrow of one's bones. The furniture was set stiffly against the colourless walls, while the dreary ornaments under their glass shades seemed—as Harry Lancaster fantastically remarked—like lost souls that had migrated into glass and china bodies, and there petrified, entranced, were forced to stand in the musty silence till the crack of Doom.

Just for one hour daily that musty silence was broken. It was an enchanted hour, especially in autumn and winter, when the firelight made the shadows dance on the walls and ceiling, and threw a rosy glow over the whole colourless scene. And then the spirit of music arose and went forth, weaving spells, and calling from the shadows a thousand other spirits who seemed to fill the dull old room with tumultuous life and the air with strange sweet thrills and whispers from a world unknown. Then the lost souls would cast off the curse that held them, and become half-human again, though they were very sad, indeed quite heart-broken, for they knew they were imprisoned in these ridiculous bodies till time should be no more, and then what awaited them but the torments of the damned? Viola would be seized sometimes with a panic as she thought of it.

There were two glass lustres on the marble mantelpiece, which caught the firelight brilliantly, and in the centre an ormolu clock with a pale blue face of Sèvres china, a clock whose design must have been conceived during a vivid opium dream of its author, so wild and unexpected were its outlines, so distracted and fantastic its whole being.

"A drunken beast," Harry Lancaster had once called

the thing after a state call at the Manor-House. As it had cost fifty pounds, Mrs. Sedley fondly hoped and concluded that it was exquisitely beautiful, and she would have been very much amazed, though but slightly offended, had any one presumed to doubt its loveliness.

If the imprisoned soul had a sensitive nature, how it must have suffered from the impertinent quirks and affected wrigglings of its domicile! how it must have hated being misrepresented to the world by so florid and undignified a body!

Perhaps Viola enjoyed her hour of practising so much partly because she was then certain to be alone. At no other time in the day could she count upon this. She would often remain in the drawing-room long after the practising was over, much to the astonishment of her mother.

There was something indescribably fascinating to the child in the silence that followed the music; it was quite unlike the silence that preceded it—unlike every other silence that one knew.

In autumn, when it grew dusk early in the afternoon, she could hear, between the pauses of the music, the sound of old "Willum's" broom sweeping the dead leaves from the path before the window. This too fascinated her. The

notes would pour out at times as if they were inspired by the roar of the wind outside, which was stripping the great trees of their foliage,—and suddenly they would cease—a pause—then always again, through the wind's tumult, the steady swish-swish upon the gravel, and the old man's bent, patient form moving slowly forwards along his path of toil.

The wild freedom of the wind, the wild sweetness of the remembered music—the dim room, the lost souls—what what was it in the scene that stirred the childish heart to its depths? Nature, human toil, human possibilities, joys unutterable, and unutterable dooms,—even here, in this sheltered monotonous home, those spectres stood upon the threshold of a young life, to announce their presence to the soul.

CHAPTER V.

BREAKING BOUNDS.

If only she was let alone, Viola could make herself very happy in the gardens and quaint old surroundings of her home. She had the poetic faculty of drawing out the secrets of common things. The cucumber-frames, the old garden, the tumble-down red-roofed sheds where Thomas potted his geraniums, the apple-house smelling so deliciously, and the conservatory, with its warm sweet scents of earth and flowers; not one of these but gave her exquisite pleasure.

She had many favourite haunts and one secret retreat in the heart of a little wood whither she used to run at rare and ecstatic moments when she managed to elude the vigilance of her nurse.

Had it not been for Viola's loving reverence for her mother, she would have much oftener tasted the delights of liberty, for they were very sweet; poor little phantom of liberty as it was that she enjoyed, when for a brief half-hour

she buried herself in her leafy hermitage, and felt that no human being in all the world knew where she was or could interfere with her, mind or body.

Viola had all sorts of treasures here, gathered in the woods and fields: plants, snail-shells, oak-apples, and insects which she kept in a large deal-box furnished forth with mould and greenery, much after the fashion of the poor tadpoles' home,—those tadpoles who, alas! had never thriven, and one morning, after a night of heavy rain, had been washed away, Heaven only knew whither. That had been a real tragedy to Viola, and now another was in store for her.

It was autumn; a mildly splendid day late in the season, but singularly warm for the time of year.

The nurse, happily, became languid with the heat, and sat down, while Viola was allowed to wander about by herself. She took the opportunity to visit her domain. The sunshine that filtered through the fretted beech-roof seemed different from any other sunshine that ever worked a forest-miracle; the wreaths of clematis and eglantine and the glossy-leaved briony flung themselves from branch to branch with wilder freedom than in any other spot in all the earth—so thought their little votary. The place corresponded to the vividly fresh and joyous side of the child's nature, as

the chill drawing-room, with its lost and tortured souls, and its patient old patrol without sweeping dead leaves from others' pathways, answered to the more thoughtful and melancholy side of her character.

The bower was sacred to Life and Liberty; the drawing-room to servitude and death, in all the forms in which they attack humanity.

Across the lawn, with Bill Dawkins at her heels, along a flower-bordered walk behind the garden-wall, Viola hastened; then out by a wicket-gate into the park, and across the open, in the face of staring cows, to a little copse, the sacred grove wherein the temple stood. She plunged in and pursued her way along the path which she had worn for herself in struggling through the underwood. She paused for a moment, thinking she caught an unusual sound in the solitude. There seemed to be a slight rustling and shaking among the leaves, as if the nerves of the little wood were thrilling. Viola's heart beat fast. What if her temple were discovered and desecrated? She hurried on breathlessly; the mysterious tremor continuing, or rather increasing, as she came near. Her forebodings were only too true!

There, in the holy of holies, stood Thomas, pruning-knife in hand (he had always been a maniacal pruner), tearing and cutting down the magnificent sheets of clematis,—just then

in the height of its glory,—crushing the berries of the briony beneath his heavy boots, and running his ruthless knife round the trunks of the trees where the ivy climbed too high.

"O Thomas, Thomas! what *have* you done?" exclaimed Viola piteously. Bill Dawkins barked aggressively at the destroyer with his tail erect, exactly as if he were saying, "On behalf, sir, of this young lady, I demand an explanation."

The old iconoclast turned slowly round and looked at Viola and her poodle, not in the least understanding.

"I'm a takin' the ivy off some of these 'ere trees," he observed, dragging down a great network of greenery and flinging it on the ground.

"Why do you take down the pretty ivy?" asked the child tearfully.

"Explain yourself, sir," barked Bill Dawkins.

"Why, because it'll kill the trees if I leaves it to grow," said Thomas.

"But why do you pull down the clematis and the briony? Oh, why do you, Thomas?"

"Why, Miss," said Thomas, puzzled, "I thought as it looked untidy sprawling all over the place; I didn't know as you liked to see it, or I wouldn't have touched it; not on no account."

Viola gave the old man a little sad forgiving smile, and the hot tears fell as she moved desolately away, like some lost spirit driven from its home.

What maniac was it who said that sorrow is the nurse of virtue? Surely it is the inspirer of all rebellious sins. It is like a storm, destroying old landmarks. How petty, how unnoticeable to the great tempest must seem the little walls and fences marking the "mine" and "thine" of men! And great sorrow, whatever its occasion, has in it all the blindness and the passion of a tempest.

It was not merely the defilement of the consecrated spot that filled the childish heart with grief. In its destruction Viola dimly saw a type of the degrading of all loveliness, the crushing of all exquisite and delicate things. A lonely life had fostered in her this poetic tendency to read figurative meanings into outward objects; and these types were to her not mere shadows, but solid links that bound together all the world, material and spiritual, in an intimately related whole.

It had always been one of Viola's dearest ambitions to reach the sea, the vision of whose sparkling immensity had strongly moved her when she and Geoffrey used to go up to the top of the great avenue and look down upon it.

But she was strictly forbidden to wander beyond the garden when her nurse was not with her, and the sea was not only beyond the garden, but beyond the park! Yet the sight of the avenue, with the long afternoon shadows lying across it, its tempting perspective leading the eye toward the forbidden country, filled Viola with an overpowering desire to be on the verge of the great waters, to feel the sea-wind in her face and hear the boom of the waves upon the beach.

Her grief made ordinary rules seem petty, and she turned her steps towards the avenue, without pausing to consider consequences, causing Bill Dawkins to give a yelp of joy, and to run gaily after the cattle, who were staring with all their might at the intruders. And now the spirit of adventure began to stir in the child's breast, and she instinctively quickened her footsteps, thrilled with the sensation of her freedom and ready to buy it at almost any price.

Arrived at the top of the avenue, she stood breathless —Bill Dawkins by her side—and gazed at the brilliant scene before her. Wood and field and farmstead lay placidly dozing in the benedictory sunshine; these merging gradually into bare downs, and these again abruptly ending in the cliffs which reared their stately ramparts to the sea.

The sea! Ah! there it lay stretched in a long gleaming line from farthest east to farthest west, hiding its mystery and its passion with a lovely smile.

Viola, climbing the locked park-gate, found herself upon the public road. She felt a faint thrill of awe as she saw it stretching before her, white and lonely between the clipped hedges.

It was poor upland country; quite different from the land about the Manor-House, which lay in the valley of a little stream. But so much the more wild and delightful!

How far away the sea might be, Viola did not know; she made straight for it, as if she had been a pilgrim bound for her shrine.

It was very lonely. For half an hour she had walked without meeting any one, and then the road ran through a little village where some children were playing, and an old woman crept along, with a bundle under her arm.

She stared at Viola, and the children stared. Bill Dawkins smelt at the bundle, and would have sniffed at the children, but they fled shrieking to their mothers. Viola quickened her pace, vaguely feeling that human beings were menacing to her liberty. A turn of the road took her again into solitude, and with it came a strange intoxication. How marvellous was this sunshine pouring down over the

wide cornfields! It seemed to confuse all reflection and to wrap the mind in an ecstatic trance. How madly the larks were singing this afternoon! The fields were athrill with the flutter of wings and the air quivered with song. Once Viola was tempted to leave the road and take a short cut by the side of a little copse, where Bill Dawkins went wild after game, and caused his mistress some delay by his misdeeds. The shadows were perceptibly longer when she and the dishevelled poodle (now distinguished by a mud-covered nose) emerged again upon the high-road.

Here the sea came clearly into sight, acting upon the heart of the little pilgrim as a trumpet-call. The country became more and more bare and bleak as it rose towards the cliffs; the crops grew thinner, and gradually cultivation fell off into little patches here and there, till at last it ceased altogether, and there was nothing but the wild down grass shivering in the sea-wind.

If inland, the sunshine had seemed brilliant and all-pervading, here on the open downs, with the gleaming of the sea all round, its glory was almost blinding.

Would they never reach the cliff-side?

Viola started into a run, and Bill Dawkins bounded madly in front of her, looking back now and then to make sure that she was following.

The saltness of the ocean was in the air; the fresh wind stung the child's cheeks to crimson. At last the end of the journey was reached; a little coastguard station marked the highest point, and then the land sloped with different degrees of abruptness towards the edge of the great cliff, which rose to a vast height above the sea, so that a boat rocking on the waves beneath had to be carefully sought for by the eye, and appeared as a tiny black speck upon the water.

There were a few streaks of smoke left far away on the horizon, in the wake of vanished steamers, and one or two fishing-boats lay becalmed; the sky line was lost in haze, a fine-weather haze, betokening heat. Viola sat down on the grass to rest, with her arm round Bill Dawkins. Oh the marvel of that sunshine! How the air thrilled and trembled with the splendour of it! The earth seemed as if it were swimming in a flood of light. Surely one could feel it reeling through the regions of space, a joy-intoxicated creature! Viola looked round, half in fear, half in rapture, at the thought of the world's mad dance through endless solitudes, and she actually believed that she felt the whirl of its motion as the breeze went by, and the wide horizon seemed to swim round her dizzily.

The swerving sensation was perhaps increased by watch-

ing the sea-gulls poising and wheeling in the air along the giddy cliff-side, and the jackdaws swarming and chattering about its clefts and crevices.

Sometimes the gulls would rise above the summit of the headland and come so close to Viola that she could hear the strange creaking of their wings as they swooped and swung and swept in a thousand graceful caprices of movement, to finish dramatically with a sudden dive or turn in the air, uttering their melancholy cry. Viola felt herself thrill from head to foot. These birds fascinated her, but she did not like them. They seemed cold, able, finished creatures, but they had no feeling, they were utterly pitiless —like Philip Dendraith, she thought. The little jackdaws were not so graceful or so perfect, but they were pleasanter and more human. They were like his kind old mother.

Ah! how sweet was the scent of the earth! how sweet the breath of the sea! Viola envied the family of the coastguardsman who dwelt in the little whitewashed cottage, with its tar-blackened waterbutt outside the door, and the flag placidly curving over the roof in the faint sea-breeze. Two sea-gulls with flashing plumage were sweeping round it, grandly undulating, while on the bank outside the house lay a young child with round limbs bare to the sun and winds, a being almost as free as the wild sea-birds themselves.

Viola wished that she too had been a child of the coast-guardsman, so that she might live always upon this cliff-side, in the fresh winds; always—sleeping and waking—have that sea-murmur in her ears, and the cry of the gulls thrilling her with sweet fancies. She was too excited to sit still. She rose presently and began to walk farther along the cliff, going near enough to the edge to see the scattered rocks at its foot, and to watch the gulls as they circled and swooped and settled in busy companies, intent upon their fishing.

At some distance farther along the coast another headland ran out into the sea, and upon it Viola could discern what looked like a ruined castle, standing desolate above the waves. Had she known the part which that castle was to play in her life she would have turned and fled back to her home instead of pursuing her adventure. She had heard her father speak of some old ruin on the coast: how once it stood far inland, but the hungry sea had gnawed at the cliffs till it crept up close to the castle, which now stood defiant to the last, refusing to yield to the besieger. As she drew near, Viola noticed that there was a belt of wind-shorn trees encircling the ruin at some distance inland, and that in a hollow of the downs lay what seemed to be the gardens and surroundings of a

human habitation. A gate led into a short avenue, at the end of which stood a large gloomy-looking house, built of grey stone. The place appeared deserted and was falling into decay. On the steps moss was growing luxuriantly, the front-door gave the impression that it was never opened, and the windows had evidently not been cleaned for years.

Viola's curiosity was aroused, but with it an undefined sense of fear; the place was so strangely lonely, and had such a deadly look of gloom. It recalled to the child her own lonely position, and suggested vague and awesome thoughts which had not assailed her out in the sunshine. But she could not leave the vault-like old house without further explorations. It had for her a mysterious fascination.

She found that it possessed great half-ruined stables and a large yard at the back,—the weeds growing apace between the paving-stones. She ventured to try if she could enter the house by the back-door, but it was locked; so was the door of the stable.

The gardens, which lay sheltered from the wind in the hollow, were beautiful in their neglected state. There was a terrace on the higher ground with a stately stone palisade, and at either end an urn, round which climbing plants were wreathed in the wildest abandonment. Below,

among the little pillars of the parapet, a fiery growth of flowers rushed up, flame-like, amid grasses and self-sown vegetation of all kinds. The house was joined to the ruin, which ran out upon the headland, and appeared to be almost surrounded by the sea. Part of the castle had been repaired and converted into a dwelling, and this had then been added to, till the habitable portion of the building attained its present gaunt appearance and great size.

Viola's next step was to explore the castle, which stood perilously balancing itself on the extreme verge of the land, striking roots, as it seemed, into the rock, and clinging on to the narrow wave-fretted headland for dear life. The limestone cliff had been worn to a mere splinter, which ran out into the sea, the neighbouring land being reft into narrow gorges, into which the waves rushed searchingly with deep reverberations. The ruin was wonderfully preserved considering its exposed situation. The walls were of immense thickness, and it seemed as if the rock on which they stood must itself crumble before they yielded to the long-continued assault of time and weather. Apparently the castle had once been a Norman stronghold, though now only a very small portion of it remained to tell the tale.

By this time the brilliancy of the day had begun to decline; and with the afternoon had come that pensive look that settles upon a landscape when the light ceases to pour down upon it directly from above. The voice of the wind, too, had grown melancholy as it wandered through the great ruined windows and stirred the sea-plants that had managed to establish themselves in the inhospitable soil.

Bill Dawkins of course had run wild, scampering hither and thither in breathless astonishment, poking his muddy nose into dark passages, scrambling helter-skelter to the top of a ruined staircase, where he would be seen standing with his comical alert-looking figure marked against the sky, tail high in the air, head well raised, and in his whole attitude an air of intelligent inquiry which would have convulsed with laughter anybody to whom animal life was a less serious affair than it was to Viola. The dog looked as if he ought to be scanning the horizon with a telescope to one eye.

Viola was just about to follow him up the steps, when she was startled, and for the moment terror-stricken, by a loud peal of laughter which rose above the ceaseless pulse-beat of the waves in the rock-chasms round about. She gave a low gasp and clutched a little tamarisk-bush beside the staircase, for she had almost fallen. She listened

breathlessly. The laughter was renewed, and Viola now heard several men's voices, apparently coming from the farthest part of the ruin. If she were discovered here, these men might be angry with her for trespassing. Her ideas were vague and full of fear; the romantic strangeness of the place, with its hollow subterranean sounds, excited her imagination. Though prepared for almost anything, however, it did not occur to her that Bill Dawkins' scamper to the top of the ruined staircase at that particular moment was to determine the whole course of her future life; but so it proved!

CHAPTER VI.

THE CUSTODIAN OF THE CASTLE.

VIOLA crouched lower and lower in her hiding-place, for she fancied the voices were coming nearer. The tones somewhat reassured her, for they were quiet and pleasant.

"I *should* like to know where the little beast comes from," one of the invisible beings remarked; "I never saw anything to beat that attitude. It's not only human, it's classical."

"Classical?" echoed a second voice, which Viola thought not quite so pleasant as the former.

"Our friend means that it possesses the attributes of a class," said a third voice, this one quite different in tone and quality from the other two; there was a slight touch of cockney accent, and an evident struggle with the temptation to say *h*attributes.

"Quite so; you always know what I mean, Foster," said the first voice; "that poodle has the manners of the highest circles; quite clear that he mingles in good society. I must really introduce him to my cousin; she would be charmed with him."

"Lady Clevedon is not without class-prejudices," the man called Foster remarked in a judicial manner. "Women of the upper ranks have much to contend with; we must look leniently upon their follies; it is the part of the philosopher to smile, not to rail, at human weakness."

Viola thought this sounded promising for her. This tolerant person, at any rate, would be on her side, if she were found guilty of the human weakness of trespassing.

"We must not forget," the philosopher pursued, "that only a limited responsibility can be attached to the human being in his present relations with the universe. Without plunging into the vexed question of Free Will, which has set so many thinkers by the ears, we must admit that our freedom *can* only exist, if at all, in a certain very modified degree. We are conscious of an ability to *choose*, but our choice is, after all, an affair of temperament, and our temperament a matter of inherited inclinations, and so forth, modified from infancy by outward conditions."

"We are not compelled to do things, only we must," some one interposed a little impatiently.

The philosopher laughed.

"Quite so, Mr. Dendraith; we are compelled by ourselves; the 'Ego' constrains itself, and I don't see how we can logically retreat from that position."

"Well, I for one am quite prepared to do it *il*logically!"

This idea seemed to stun the philosopher, who made no reply.

At the mention of the word *Dendraith* Viola's heart stopped beating. The memory of that visit to Upton Court still rankled, and her hands clenched themselves fiercely as she thought of it. Presently, to her horror and surprise, the enemy came in sight, followed by his companions. They could not see her, for she was hidden behind the flight of steps.

They had strolled on till they came to one of the great windows, and here they established themselves in a group, Philip Dendraith sitting in the deep embrasure, digging out weeds from between the stones with the end of his stick; Harry Lancaster leaning against the masonry with his head thrown back; while the philosopher, a small fair man with a little face and big forehead, sat huddled together on a large stone, amidst a tangle of weedy vegetation, the tips of his fingers joined, and his head meditatively on one side. His hands showed that he had been engaged in manual work. He was pale, and spare; and he wore a small, very fair beard and moustache. His eyes were light blue and exceedingly intelligent.

Against the background of gleaming sea the figure of

Philip Dendraith, framed by the rough Norman window, stood out very strikingly. Every line was strong and flowing, and the face laid equal claims to admiration.

Yet, perfect as it was, it by no means lacked strength or individuality, as handsome faces often do. There was only too much strength in the thin delicate lips, and in the square jaw which gave vigour to the face, without heaviness. The eyes were rather small and close-set; keen in expression. Dark, sleek hair, closely cropped, harmonised with a smooth, brown and colourless skin; a laugh or smile displayed a set of miraculously white teeth, even and perfect as if they had been artificial. As often happens, this last perfection gave a singularly cold expression to the face; after the first shock of admiration (for it was nothing less), this became chillingly apparent, but the eye still lingered on the chiselled outlines with a sort of fascination. Philip Dendraith seldom smiled, but when he did the smile had always the same character. It was steely and brilliant, with a lurking mockery not pleasant to encounter. His manners, young man as he was, were very polished; he was by instinct a courtier.

"If the fellow were going to murder you," Harry Lancaster used to say, "he would bow you into an easy-chair, so that you might have it done comfortably."

It would have been hard to find two men more unlike than Philip Dendraith and Harry Lancaster.

Cold, keen, self-reliant, fascinating, Philip compelled admiration, and to certain natures his personality was absolutely dazzling. Power of all kinds is full of attraction, and power this young man possessed in no common degree. Already he was beginning to exercise an almost boundless influence over women, whose education—the potent, unconscious education of their daily lives—tends to exaggerate in them the universal instinct to worship what is strong.

Harry Lancaster's charm, curiously enough, lay partly in the absence of certain qualities that made the other man so attractive. He had none of those subtle flatteries which were so pleasant even when they could not be supposed to proceed from real feeling, but he was genial, ready to help, quick to foresee and avoid what might wound another's feelings; daring, nevertheless, in the expression of unpopular opinion to the last extreme.

In Philip's suavities there often lurked a hidden sting—so well hidden that it could not be openly resented, yet full of the bitter poison of a sneer.

It was in his nature to despise men and women, and to rule them through their weakness for his own ends.

"As we were saying, then, before our friend's inordinate

laughter interrupted our cogitations," the philosopher remarked, taking up the lost thread of conversation with his usual pertinacity—"as we were saying, Realism as opposed to Nominalism is doomed to extinction under the powerful"——

"Paw," suggested Philip.

"Paw of Science?" said Caleb Foster dubiously. "The metaphor seems crude."

"But powerful, like the Paw," said Philip, sending a pebble spinning over the window-ledge into the sea.

"Science," pursued Caleb, weighing his words, "is the enemy of poetry and mysticism"——

"I doubt that," said Harry; "I think it has a poetry and mysticism of its own."

"That point we must lay aside for after-discussion," returned the clear-headed Caleb quietly.

"Better put that aside, certainly," observed Philip.

"Science views Nature as a vast concourse of atoms constrained only by certain eternal vetos (if one may so speak), and out of the general co-ordination of these vetoed units arise the multiplex phenomena that we see around us."

Viola bent forward eagerly, trying hard to understand.

"The vetos may be of the simplest character, but how-

ever simple and however few, a complex result must arise from their grouping under the conditions. Given the alphabet, we get a literature. There you have the doctrine of Necessity in a nutshell."

Philip turned his small eyes languidly on the speaker.

"And—what then?" he asked.

"What then?" echoed the philosopher. "Having got rid of misleading conceptions, philosophy migrates to new pastures. We no longer speak of life as if it were some outside mysterious influence that pours into dead matter and transforms it; we believe that there is no such independent imponderable, but only different states of matter arising from forces within itself."

"And anything that goes on outside the pale of our cognition——?" asked Philip, slightly raising his eyebrows.

"Such things," said Harry, "are, philosophically speaking, not 'in Society;' one doesn't hear about them; one doesn't call upon them; they are not in our set."

The philosopher seemed a little puzzled. He smiled a melancholy smile and looked pensively out to sea.

Philip was still engaged in sending small stones spinning into the void, and he had gradually worked himself so far towards the outer edge that half his body appeared to be

overhanging the sea, which lay immediately below the window.

"I say, you'll very soon be 'not in our set' yourself if you don't look out," said Harry.

Philip laughed, and swung himself round, so that now he was sitting with both legs over the farther edge of the embrasure. He seemed to revel in the danger. Viola turned cold as she saw him lean half out of the window in the effort to descry a ship on the horizon.

"Instantaneous death is not, strictly speaking, a calamity," observed the irrepressible philosopher; "the mind has no time to dwell upon the idea of its own destruction. Pain, mental or physical, is the sole misfortune that can befall a man, and this is incompatible with unconsciousness."

"Well, then, Foster, suppose you give me the pleasure of treating you as I treat these pebbles; let me flick you dexterously into the ocean."

But the philosopher laughed knowingly, and shook his head.

"Reason is not our ruling attribute," he said; "sentiment is the most powerful principle in the human breast."

"Come out, will you?" cried Philip, apostrophising an obstinate pebble which had wedged itself tightly in between

two blocks of stone. "I *will* have you out; the thing imagines it is going to beat me!"

"Have you never been beaten?" inquired Harry.

"No; nor do I intend to be, by man, woman, or child," Philip answered, with a screw of the lips as he at last forced out and flung away the refractory pebble.

His manner gave one the impression that so he would treat whomsoever should resist him. The mixture of indolence and invincible determination that he displayed was very singular.

Caleb Foster expressed an idea that was passing through Harry's mind when he said, disjointedly, as if thinking aloud, "Given with this temperament, irresponsible power, absence of control—lessons of life artificially withheld—result, a Nero."

"Are you calling me a Nero?" asked Philip, with a laugh. "Nothing like philosophy for frankness. What's my sin?"

"Ask your conscience," returned Caleb. "*I* know of none."

"My conscience has struck work," said Philip; "I gave it so much to do that I tired it out."

Caleb gave a thoughtful nod.

"I believe that it may indeed become obscured by

over-exercise," he said. "The simple human impulses of truth and justice are, after all, our surest guides. Too subtle thinking on moral questions makes egoists and straw-splitters of us, and hands us over to the mercies of our fallible judgments."

"And why not?" asked Harry.

He insisted—much to Viola's consternation—that goodness and intelligence are truths identical, and that one of them could never lag far behind the other.

"Granted their close affinity," said Caleb, "but it does not follow that the most reasonable man is also the most moral. Morality is not evolved afresh in each human being by a logical exercise. It is the result of a long antecedent process of experiment which has embedded itself, so to speak, in the human constitution, so that morality is, as it were, reason preserved"——

"Apt to have a bad flavour, and to be sometimes poisonous from the action of the tins," added Harry.

The philosopher thought over this for some seconds, with his head very much on one side.

Philip Dendraith had another definition of morality.

"I speak from observation," he said, "and from that I gather that it is immoral to be found out. I can conceive no other immorality."

"Halloa! here's our friend the gentlemanly Poodle!" exclaimed Harry, as that intelligent animal appeared in sight.

Bill Dawkins paused in his headlong career, and stood staring at the group.

"I wonder who your master is," Harry continued, redoubling his blandishments; "perhaps the name is on the collar. Hi! good dog—*rats!!*"

Bill Dawkins pricked up his ears and bore down upon the indicated spot. The philosopher found that his highly developed forehead had become the destination of a lively shower of earth and small stones, which the dog was grubbing up, sniffing and snorting excitedly. Caleb quietly removed his forehead out of range and stood looking on.

"If the beast hasn't almost upset the Philosopher's Stone!" exclaimed Harry.

Caleb opened his mouth to speak.

"We might find in these efforts a type of the Realist's struggle to lay hold of the abstraction in his own mind, an *eidolon* which he translates into objective existence," he observed, calmly and persistently philosophic. But the young men were too much occupied in cheering on the deluded poodle to heed him.

"No name on the collar," said Harry; "but he's clearly

a highly connected animal—well-bred too; and he's beginning to see it's a hoax; he's giving it up in despair and registering cynical vows not to the credit of mankind."

"Come here, animal," said Philip.

Bill Dawkins' nostrils moved inquiringly.

"I want some amusement, and I think you can give it me."

As Bill Dawkins did not obey, Philip laid hold of him by the ear and compelled him to come; much to the creature's indignation.

Bringing a piece of string from his pocket, the young man then proceeded to tie the dog's legs together diagonally; his right front paw to his left hind paw, and the other two in the same way.

The result, when he was set down again, was a series of agitated stumbles and a state of mind simply frantic. The sight seemed to afford Philip much joy; he looked on and laughed at the creature's struggles.

"This is a subtle and penetrating form of wit," Harry remarked, with a frown; but Caleb Foster seemed amused at the animal's embarrassment, good-natured man though he was.

"He'd make a good target," remarked Philip, taking aim at the poodle with a small stone, and following up with a

second and a third in rapid succession. The last one hurt; for the dog gave a loud yelp, and Harry, flushing up, was springing to the rescue, when an angry cry rang through the air, and almost at the same instant the dog was encircled by a pair of small arms, and hugged and caressed as even that well-appreciated poodle had never been caressed in his life before.

"By the Lord Harry, it's the little Sedley girl!"

CHAPTER VII.

MURDER.

FRANTICALLY Viola tore off the string that bound the creature's legs, and then turning fiercely to Philip, she said, with quivering lips, white with passion, "How dare you ill-treat my dog? How dare you? You are a cruel, wicked man, and I hate you!"

"Well done, little virago," said Philip, laughing. "Now, tell one who has your welfare sincerely at heart, how did you get here all by yourself?"

"Why did you throw stones at Bill Dawkins? You are cruel—you are wicked; I think you are Satan."

There was a shout of laughter at this.

"Well, I *have* had two good compliments this afternoon!" Philip exclaimed, still laughing; "to be called Nero and Satan within half-an-hour is something to remember oneself by!"

"Poor, good dog! poor, poor dog!" cried the child, almost in tears, and stooping again to caress him.

"Your dog is not much hurt, little girl," said Harry kindly. "See, he is wagging his tail quite cheerfully; he knows it is all right."

"He always forgives very easily," said Viola. "*I* wouldn't forgive that man if I were he."

"Now, do you know, little lady, I believe you are mistaken," said Philip, with one of his brilliant smiles; "I wouldn't mind betting that the time will come when you would forgive me far greater offences than this one against your poodle. You belong to the forgiving sex, you know."

"No, I don't," cried Viola, fiercely.

"Do you mean to say, for instance, that you haven't forgiven me for kissing you that afternoon at our house? You were very angry at the time, but you are not angry about that now—are you?"

Viola's face was a study.

Philip threw back his head and laughed at the look of helpless passion which made the child almost speechless.

"There is some mettle here," he said, addressing the others; "a high-spirited young animal who would be worth breaking in when she grows up. Women of this type love their masters."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Harry, as he bent

down and tried to soothe the excited little girl, and to find out how she came to be here alone.

"Life," said the philosopher, with amiable intent, "is beset with inevitable disturbances of the mental equilibrium (perhaps the child does not understand the word *equilibrium*—let us therefore substitute *balance*). These, however, it is possible to reduce to a minimum by a habit of mind which—but I fear I fail to impress our little friend. No matter. In early years the human being is the creature of impulse; reason has not yet ascended the throne. We must be content to be the sport of circumstances. Are you content to be the sport of circumstances, my good child?"

Viola looked shy and shook her head.

"The little woman is a treasure!" exclaimed Philip, laughing. "Now I want to make you say you forgive me," he went on, unexpectedly stooping down and lifting her into the window embrasure, where he established himself in his old perilous position, with Viola struggling in his arms.

"I say, do look out," cried Harry; "a mere breath would send you into the sea."

Philip treated these warnings with contempt.

"Now, listen to me," he said quietly, as he quelled the child's struggles with a clever movement; "it is of

no use fighting, for I am stronger than you; but I don't want to make you stay here against your will; I want you to stay willingly, and to say that you forgive me, and that you like me very much."

"I hate you," said Viola.

"Oh! no, you don't," cried Philip in a low, soft voice; "you can't hate a poor man who thinks you a nice, dear little girl, and wants you to be fond of him. That wouldn't be fair, would it?"

Viola was silent: he had struck the right chord.

"If I had known the dog belonged to you, I wouldn't have tied his legs together or thrown stones at him;—(though they were very little stones, you know.) Now won't you forgive me if I say I am very sorry?"

"No," said Viola. "Let me go."

Philip gave a deep sigh.

"You pain me very much," he said. "What can a man do when he has offended but say he is sorry and will never do it again?"

"Let me go," repeated Viola.

"I say, Philip, you are teasing the child," remonstrated Harry.

"No, I'm not; I want to make amends to her, and see if she has a nice disposition."

"You want to experiment with your diabolical power," muttered Harry.

"Now, Viola," Philip continued (his voice was very soothing and caressing), "you see how repentant I am, and how anxious I am to be forgiven; I want you just to say these words after me, and to give me a kiss of pardon when you have said them. These are the words: 'Philip Dendraith, though you have behaved very badly, yet because you are fond of me, and repent, I forgive you, and I kiss you in sign of pardon.' When you have said that I will release you."

"I won't say it," said Viola.

"Oh! but I am sure you will. You know that it would be right and just to say it. I know your mother teaches you to be forgiving, and that you will forgive. See, I am so sure of it that I open my arms and leave you at liberty."

He released her, and waited with a smile to see what she would do. She stared at him in a dazed manner. His arguments had bewildered her; she felt that she had been trusted, and that it would be dishonourable to betray the trust; and yet—and yet the man had no right to interfere with her liberty. There was a vague sense that his seemingly generous confidence had something fraudulent in it, though it placed him in a becoming light.

A look of pain crossed the child's face, from her certainty of this, and her utter inability to put it into words. Few people know how cruelly children often suffer from this inequality in their powers of apprehension and expression.

"It's not fair," was all she could say. However, Philip had so far gained his point that she did not take advantage of her freedom to leave her tormentor; she only shrank away as far as she could, and sat with her head pressed against the stonework of the window.

The partial victory made Philip's eyes glisten; it was delicious to him to use his power, and he already regarded Viola as an adversary worthy of his mettle, child though she was.

Harry, thinking she was reconciled to the situation, abandoned thoughts of interference, and Philip, with much tact, forbore to press his advantage. He began to talk about impersonal matters, cleverly spinning stories on the slenderest thread of suggestion, and so much did he interest the child that she forgot who was speaking, and forgetting that, forgot to be angry.

Philip smiled, and glanced over his shoulder at his companions.

"The forgiving sex!"

"Tell me some more, please," said Viola, in a dreamy tone.

"Once upon a time," Philip went on obediently, "this old castle stood six miles inland, before the sea bit its way up to it and bombarded it as it is doing now. At that time it was one of the finest castles in England, and the barons who owned it were very powerful. I fear they were rather a quarrelsome lot; we hear of them having endless rows with other nobles, and one of them, not content with his own wife, must needs take away the wife of one of his neighbours; and the neighbour was annoyed about it, and challenged him to single combat, and they hacked at one another for a whole afternoon in plate armour (electro-plate, you know, not real silver). It was a dreadful scene."

"And what happened?" asked Viola breathlessly.

"Well, the other baron ran his lance through Lord Dendraith's arm, and he said, 'A hit, a very palpable hit;' but the baron, putting his lance in his left hand, came on again, swearing diabolically, and this time he unhorsed my ancestor and smashed in his helmet, and then he gave him a deep wound in the leg, and soon the tilting-ring was swimming in gore, for the two men were both wounded. The bystanders noticed that it

was very blue in colour, the barons being both of noble blood. But in spite of their wounds they swore they wouldn't give in, and up sprang Lord Dendraith on to his horse, and up sprang Lord Burleigh on to his, and the clang of their armour when the lances came down upon it could be heard within a radius of fifteen miles. The people at that distance took it for the sound of threshing-flails in the vicinity, and were not interested."

"And then?" said Viola.

"Then," continued Philip, "the battle raged so fiercely that even the fierce members of the Dendraith family were seen to tremble; the plumes of their helmets actually quivered, and a murmur of rustling feathers ran round the crowded ring, when for a second, there was a pause in the combat. The blows were falling so fast now that there was nothing to be seen but a sort of blurr in the air in the path of the flashing lances."

"Oh!" exclaimed Viola, horror-stricken.

"'By Heaven! I swear I will fight thee to the death!' roared Lord Burleigh.

"'The devil be my witness, I will follow thee to hell!' bellowed Lord Dendraith.

"And so they fell to with fresh vigour. The two men

were very equally matched, and when one inflicted a wound, the other retaliated with an exactly corresponding injury; when one chopped off a particular portion of his enemy, the other chose the same portion and lopped it off likewise; so that they worked each other gradually down, and it seemed as if they were going to finish the fight with the mere fragmentary remains of what were once exceedingly fine men.

"When at last each had driven his lance into the other's right lung and unhorsed him, the bystanders interfered, and suggested that the noble barons having already lost several limbs, besides cracking their skulls, and mutually causing their teeth (with a few not-worth-mentioning exceptions) to strew the ground, they might consider their honour satisfied; especially as their present plight rendered further fighting highly unsuitable.

"But the furious barons would not hear of it; they declared they had never felt better in their lives, and with a violent effort they dragged themselves to their feet (they had now only two between them), and each with his dying breath dealt the other a death-blow. And that was the famous combat between Lord Dendraith and the Lord of Burleigh," concluded Philip.

"Is that the end?" asked Viola.

"Yes; though I may mention that the widows shortly afterwards married again."

Viola remained silent and thoughtful; the tragic finish of the tale weighed upon her.

"One can see where you get your absurd obstinacy from," said Harry.

"I don't own to being obstinate," returned Philip "obstinacy is the dullard's quality. I have tried to avoid it, as I fancy it is in the Dendraith race."

"Who were anything but dullards," Caleb threw in.

Philip bowed.

"They improved towards later times," he said. "Some foreign blood came into the family, and, rather curiously, it developed on a substratum of the old stubborn, stupid spirit a subtlety almost Italian. Andrew, who repaired part of the castle and built the house, combined these qualities very strikingly. He murdered his sweetheart, you know, little lady," Philip went on, seeing that Viola was interested, "because he found that she liked another man better than she liked him, and no Dendraith could stand that. He offered her his love, and she coquetted a little with him for a time, and then"——

"What is coquetted?" asked Viola.

"Well, she wouldn't say plainly whether she liked him

or not; but he swore that she should be his, or no other man should have her. Unluckily, he found she had a more favoured lover, and then and there, without foresight or consideration, he stabbed her. The other more cunning side of his character showed itself afterwards in his clever manner of eluding detection for years. The truth never came out till he told it himself on his deathbed. It is said, of course, that the ghost of the murdered lady haunts the castle to this day."

"Is this your castle?" asked Viola, after a long and thoughtful pause.

"No, it is my father's at present; but he is going to give it me as soon as I marry. It used to be a fine place, and it can be made so again. So you see, Viola, I am worth making friends with. Perhaps when you grow up, if you are good, I will marry you! What do you say to that?"

"I don't want to marry you," said Viola, her old resisting spirit roused again.

"What! not after all the nice stories I have told you?"

"No," said Viola curtly.

"Not to become mistress of the castle, and to have that big house and garden for your own, and some beautiful diamonds that I would give you?"

She shook her head.

"This is *not* like the sex," Philip observed, with a laugh. "Think how nice it would be to have a big house all to yourself, and diamonds, and a husband who would tell you stories whenever you asked him! The luxury of that can scarcely be overrated. You had better think seriously of this matter before you refuse me; there will be a great many others only too delighted to have a chance of all these good things."

"Husbands with a turn for narrative being proverbially popular," Harry threw in.

"And husbands with a turn for diamonds still more so," Philip added. "I am sure that Viola will see these things more wisely as she grows older. So confident am I of it, in fact, that I intend to regard her from this time forth as my little betrothed"——

Philip laughed at the flash that came into the child's eyes. Presently he went on in a coaxing tone: "Now, Viola, you are going to be nice and kind, and say you are fond of me, and give me a kiss, aren't you? Remember, I let you go free when I might easily have kept you prisoner all this time."

"I think your arms would have ached by now if you *had*," observed Caleb, with a chuckle.

Viola had drawn herself together as if preparing to spring to the ground and escape, but Philip quickly frustrated her design. She was still untrammelled, but a strong arm across the window barred the egress.

She tried to push it away, but she might as well have tried to break down the Norman stonework against which the large well-formed hand was resting. She beat it angrily with her clenched fists.

"Oh! that's naughty!" cried Philip, much amused. "Supposing you were to hurt me?"

"I want to!"

Viola continued to strike the hand and arm with all her might.

"Now, you know, there is but one cure for this sort of thing," said Philip, with a brilliant smile.

Relaxing the tension of the obnoxious arm, he placed it round the child, and drew her towards him, saying that he must give her a mixed kiss, combining the ideas of punishment and betrothal.

"Upon my word, you *will* be over that precipice if you don't look out!" warned Harry again.

"Pooh! I'm all right," said Philip impatiently.

Expecting Viola to struggle away from his clutches, he had adjusted his attitude accordingly, but instead of this

she flung herself wildly upon him with rage-begotten strength, and before he could recover from the shock, in his dangerous position, he had completely lost his balance. The whole thing was over in an instant.

"Good God! he's gone!" exclaimed Harry, springing into the embrasure with one bound, followed by Caleb.

The two men looked in each other's white faces for a second of awful silence.

Harry leant back against the stonework with a breathless groan, drawing his hand across his brow.

He was on the very spot where, a second ago, Philip had been lolling in his indolent way, defying the danger that lay within an inch of him, the danger that Harry had warned him against in vain.

The unceasing lapping of the waves on the cliff below made the moment absolutely ghastly. It was like the licking of the lips of some animal that has just devoured his victim.

"What's to be done? He *can't* be killed!" cried Harry at last. It seemed incredible. Caleb laid his arm round the young man's shoulders, and together they peered over the verge. White and pitiless the cliff dropped dizzily to the sea. Philip was an athlete and a splendid climber,

but who could keep footing on such a place as this? The only hopeful sign was, that they saw nothing of the body. The cliff was not perpendicular; that gave another faint consolation. They had forgotten all about Viola in the horror of the moment, but the sound of low passionate sobbing recalled her presence to their minds.

"I have killed him; I have killed him," she moaned in accents so utterly heartbroken, that they sent a horrified thrill through the hearts of her companions. There was something so grief-experienced in the despair of the child; almost it seemed as if she were bewailing the inevitable accomplishment of a foreknown doom. She might have been the heroine of some Greek tragedy crying "αἰ αἰ" at the fulfilment of her fate.

Harry tried to soothe her.

"Oh! find him, find him: he is not killed; he cannot be killed," she wailed. "Come and find him; come and find him."

Feverishly she took Harry's hand to lead him away.

"It was my fault; I have killed him. Come—come!"

In pursuit of a most forlorn hope the three set out together, under Caleb's guidance, he being familiar with the cliffs, and able to lead them by comparatively easy descents to the foot of the rock. Viola was most anxious to go all

the way, but Harry told her that she would delay him and Caleb in their search, and this alone induced her to stay and watch from above.

Rough steps had been hewn out of the rock in places, to enable people living in the castle to get down easily to the sea, and these now proved of immense value, though at best it was dangerous work, and very exciting. The slightest slip would have been punished with death. Now and then they had to take little jumps from ledge to ledge, or to crawl on their hands and knees, clinging for dear life. They stood still now and then to rest, and to shout at the top of their voices in case Philip, by some miracle, had been saved and might answer them. Bnt no answer came.

"It does not seem to me quite impossible that he should have broken his fall by means of some of these inequalities in the side of the cliff. The absolute smoothness vanishes on closer acquaintance."

It was Caleb who spoke.

"And there is an inclined plane here," Harry observed; "steep, indeed, but one's momentum would be checked in striking it."

"Certainly; and Philip is the man to have that good fortune, if any man *could* have it; and to take advantage of it."

Cheering themselves with these suppositions, they slowly continued their journey. The sun was sinking, and sent a fiery line of gold across the water, dazzling them with its brilliancy, and making their difficult task more difficult still. The gulls were wheeling overhead, congregating and settling on the waters with beautiful airy movements. It made the two men feel giddy to look at them. Glancing towards the fatal window, whither Viola had returned to sit tremulously watching, it struck Harry that if he and Caleb were both to be killed, the child would be without a protector. Standing on a narrow ledge of rock, he shouted up to her, "Throw down a small stone if you hear me."

A pebble came straight as a plummet-line from the window, striking the inclined plane, bounding up and taking a curved path thence into the sea, which it entered with a faint little plump.

"If we should not return, go at once to the coastguard station—it's not two hundred yards off; tell them who you are; ask them to take care of you for the night, and send a message to your home that you are safe. Another stone if you hear; two stones if only partly."

Two stones came down and behaved in the same manner as before. The advice was repeated, and then a single

stone fell in token of understanding. With an encouraging wave of the hand, Harry pursued his perilous journey. From above, the cliff had appeared smooth and uneventful, but now a thousand secrets betrayed themselves. Caleb was working his way towards a part of the rock that lay at present out of sight below the inclined plane. Struck by the action of the pebble, it had occurred to him that Philip's body might have followed the same route, but being heavier in comparison with its momentum, would not have described a parabola (as the philosopher put it to himself), but would have fallen or slipped to the surface immediately below. If here, by some good luck, there were a resting-place, hope still remained. This idea Caleb communicated to Harry, who checked an impulse to pass on the encouraging view to Viola. It was a pity, he thought, to rouse her hope on such slender grounds. The search had by this time insensibly changed its character in Harry's eyes. He now regarded it partly as it affected the mind of the little girl whose passionate action had caused the mishap. Her remorse and horror had been terrible to witness, and Harry felt that if Philip proved to be really killed the shock to her might prove to be very dangerous indeed. Her conduct that afternoon had showed him of what sort of stuff she was made.

This was a nature, like a deep sea, capable of profound disturbances. At that time Harry had not learnt that the nature with material for such storms has generally within it also a strange cohesion and power of endurance which enable it to stand together through crises that would seem more than enough to shatter the most firmly knit intellect.

"Look out," Caleb called back to his companion, as a stone rolled down the slope; "you are coming to an awkward place now."

Harry found that he stood on a projecting ledge of rock, where below him for about twenty feet there was no further resting-place; to the left rose a buttress of rock; to the right the ledge shelved away to nothing, the slight foothold dwindling till it disappeared altogether.

"How in the name of wonder did you get past here?" he called to Caleb.

"I climbed up, and got round the projection on the other side; but the bit of stone I got up by gave way under my feet, and I fear you will have to stay where you are for the present."

As this fact was borne in upon him, Harry cursed his ill luck. The loosened flint that had enabled Caleb to climb the escarpment lay resting on the slope of rock below him

twenty feet. The prisoner looked anxiously at the sun. Nothing could be done when the darkness came on, and if it should overtake him he would have to stay here all night, unable to lie down, scarcely able to turn,—it was not a pleasant prospect.

"I can't possibly get out of this position without help," he called out; "but how are you getting on?"

"I am working my way to the place I told you of; I shall soon be there. If I find him, I will shout to you; and we can consult as to what is to be done. Perhaps the little girl could find you a rope somewhere about the house. There is one in my kitchen, do what you can as to that; meanwhile I will not forget you. The sun won't be down for another two hours yet."

With these words Caleb passed entirely out of sight, and Harry was left to solitude and his own reflections.

He shouted up to Viola above, and was answered by a tiny pebble.

"We want a rope," he called up. "Will you go to Caleb's house and bring one that you will find there in the kitchen? His house is in the castle keep; it has been repaired and made into a dwelling for him; it stands at the end of the castle, right out to sea—you can't mistake it."

"I understand," was signalled back in pebble language.

Harry knew that the child's anxious misery would be relieved by action, and, besides, her help might be very valuable. The thought of her strange and terrible situation at this moment recurred to him with increasing insistence. Philip Dendraith had been to Harry only a newly-made acquaintance, and his accident affected him little more than if it had befallen a total stranger. There was no personal grief in his heart, and he was therefore free to speculate on the feelings of one more tragically interested. He was beginning to feel anxious about her, for he doubted if she could be persuaded to leave the spot until Philip had been found, and there was the sun racing towards the horizon, and still Caleb gave no sign.

Everything depended upon him.

Viola found the rope, and as soon as she returned Harry directed her to go to the coastguard station for help. She was to ask to have the news forwarded to the Manor-House and Upton Court, and also to bring some brandy. Pebbles came down in token of understanding, and the little figure disappeared from the window. Harry found himself alone in the hushful twilight.

It seemed as if Nature were doing her utmost to soothe his anxieties and whisper messages of peace in his ears.

Long lines of cloud and sea swept serenely from coast to distant coast; the sunset lights were rich and glowing, promising a glorious morrow; while at the cliff's foot the glossy waters lapped with a soft sea-sound that might have lulled the frenzy of a madman's dream.

Harry felt the influences steal into his heart, and as the glow grew fainter in the sky, and the cold evening light—almost electric in its still lustre—crept over the waters, he realised with a start that the last quarter of an hour had been one of the happiest of his life. Full of emotions, of delicious insights and longings, it had brought to him, upon the inflowing tide of heightened consciousness, a thrilling sense of the glory and the sweetness of existence.

Then for the first time he fully realised the tragedy that had occurred that afternoon; a strong fresh life hurried perhaps into dark unconsciousness, with all its infinite possibilities blotted out.

Away "pale Philosophy," which would persuade the life-intoxicated soul that death is no calamity! Death is *the* great calamity towards which our sins and our errors are for ever thrusting us. Life—full, rich, wide-spreading life—the one great universal Good, in whose delicious ocean all right and healthy things in heaven and earth are steeped

till the sweet waters steal in and fill them through and through. Such was Harry Lancaster's present creed.

A shout broke the stillness.

"I have found him!"

"Alive?"

"Don't know; he does not move;—I am trying experiments."

It was maddening to be imprisoned here when help was so much needed! Harry, for the hundredth time, tried to persuade himself that he could escape by some deed of daring, but had to own that none but suicidal attempts were possible. He told Caleb that Viola must shortly return with help.

"That's lucky!" shouted the philosopher. "I believe he is alive, though he has been severely knocked about; he is stunned, but he seems to me to breathe still faintly. It is an absolute miracle! I wish I had some brandy. When the little girl returns with help"——

"Ah! well done, well done! Here she is!—and the coastguardsman himself to the rescue."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Caleb. "Come to me as soon as you can. No time to be lost."

Harry shouted up to the man to let down the brandy and to attach the rope firmly somewhere above. In a few

seconds he had the joy of seeing a quaint-looking flask sliding down the cliff towards him. Quickly detaching the flask, he put it in his pocket, and seizing the rope, swung himself down obliquely, the coastguardsman moving it from time to time along the castle wall. It was not long before he had scrambled almost to the foot of the cliff, where he found Caleb beside the motionless body of Philip.

Harry sprang to his side and handed him the brandy without a word.

"This may save him," said Caleb, as he raised the body in his arms and administered the life-draught. "Now, there is no time to lose; he must be moved to my house at once, while he is unconscious; after he revives the pain would retard us. His left leg is broken, I fear, and I dare say that is not the only injury, poor fellow! You take his feet, I'll take his head, and forward."

Caleb, giving the word of command, led the way to the beach, the two men carrying the burden for about a quarter of a mile over the shingle, and then up by a rough but moderately easy ascent, at a point where the cliffs were less steep and less lofty. They had perforce to pause for breath now and again, and then the dose of brandy was repeated.

At the second pause a faint movement, showing that Philip was still alive, was the signal for moving on at a still more rapid rate.

The distance seemed very great, for Philip was no light burden, and their wishes so far outstripped their powers that progress appeared slow indeed.

"What's that?" said Harry, peering through the dusk. "I think I see two figures coming towards us."

He was right. A few minutes brought them face to face with Viola and the good-natured coastguardsman, who had guessed what the others had done, and come on to lend a hand. He turned Harry off altogether, and insisted on taking his place till he had "got the wind into his sails again," after which Caleb was subjected to a similar process of nautical recuperation.

Before Viola's white lips had time to frame the question, "Is he alive?" Harry had communicated the fact of Philip's almost miraculous escape.

The blood ebbed away from her face for a moment, and then came rushing back again in a great tumult. She said not a word, but kept close beside Philip, watching his still face intently.

"Did you get a message sent to your mother?" Harry inquired.

"Yes; I said I was quite safe, and that you had told me what to do, and were taking care of me. Also I asked her to send on the news, as you told me."

Caleb's hermitage at the far end of the castle was a strange, romantic little dwelling, patched together by his own hands out of the ruined keep; the arrow-holes having been widened into windows, while the old spiral staircase still served the ingenious philosopher as a means of reaching his little bedroom, where every night he was lulled to sleep by the ceaseless music of the waves. From this haven of repose the mattress and blankets were brought down to the kitchen, where a good fire was burning; Philip was laid upon the bed close to the hearth, and then Caleb proceeded to apply all his wide and accurate knowledge to the task before him.

While engaged in arduous efforts to restore the lost animation, he was giving explicit directions to his colleagues to assist him, and to collect various things that he required in order to set the broken leg and bind up the wounds.

"He is badly hurt," said Caleb; "but if he lives, he will be none the worse for this, if I am not much mistaken."

"Oh, he'll live all right," said the coastguardsman, seeing, with singular quickness, that Viola turned white at the philosopher's "*if*." "There! I saw a quiver of the eyelid. You are breathing your own life into him, Mr. Foster; —he *must* come round. Don't you never be afraid, little 'un," he added, patting Viola on the head; "the young gentleman'll live to be a sorrow to his parents for many a long day yet! You mark my words."

The coastguardsman's prophecy proved true. Caleb, with the assistance of his companions, did, after much effort, succeed in fanning the dim little spark of life to a feeble but certain flame.

Philip opened his eyes, gave a sigh, and sank heavily back on the pillows.

"The leg must be set," said Caleb. "Happily I know how to do it. Now I want you all to be very intelligent," he said, as he bent down to perform the operation; "upon my skill and the general good management of the affair hangs the issue of a life-time. If I do not set it with perfect accuracy one leg will be shorter than the other."

There was an anxious silence in the little room as the philosopher, with skilful, decided movements set about the momentous task.

Philip was by this time vaguely conscious of his surroundings, but too weak to ask any questions. Perhaps his rapid mind had taken in the facts without assistance. He very much surprised the bystanders by saying in a weak but clear voice, "Are you going to set my leg, Foster?"

"Yes; we can't wait for a doctor. I have done it before —trust to me."

Almost as he spoke he wrenched the parts into position, and Philip gave a groan.

"The worst is over," Caleb said cheerfully; "brace yourself for another wrench, and then the deed is done."

This time there was only a laboured drawing of the breath from the patient, and then the limb was bound to a bar of wood by means of bands made, on the spur of the moment, out of cloths and towels, and the patient was told that for the present he would be left in peace.

Very quietly and rapidly Caleb made arrangements for the night. The coastguardsman was thanked for his services and assured that no further help was needed. Caleb and Harry would take turns in the night-watch, while Viola could go to bed in the room sanctified by philosophic slumbers, and dream that she was a mer-

maid playing with her own tail in the depth of the green ean.

So said Harry, recovering already from the afternoon's strain of anxiety and fatigue.

Caleb silenced at once Viola's pleading to be allowed to sit up and watch the patient. Not to-night, he said, or she would be another patient on his hands by the morrow, and then how could Philip be properly nursed?

"Say good-night to him, my little friend," said Caleb kindly, "and then I'll take you upstairs."

The child went up to the bed and knelt down by Philip's side. In spite of manful efforts, the tears welled up into her eyes, but she made no sound. She seemed to be struggling with herself; her lips moved. Then suddenly she bent forward, uttering Philip's name, and as she bade him good-night she kissed him on the brow.

"I am so sorry; I am so very sorry!"

Philip, weak as he was, gave a slight laugh. The afternoon's event, nearly fatal though it had been, amused him.

"You almost did for me, little one," he said, "but it's all right, and you didn't mean to do it, you know."

Viola turned abruptly away from the bedside, and Caleb, taking her in his arms, carried her tenderly up the dark

winding staircase to the strange little room, through whose lozenge-paned windows a faint moon was tracing diamond patterns on the bare floor.

"You won't be frightened here, will you?" Caleb asked. "Mr. Lancaster and I are in the room below, and should hear you in a minute if you called."

"I shall not be frightened," said Viola.

Yet a thrill of terror went through her when Caleb, having done all he could think of for her comfort, shut the door and left her alone.

The excitement of the day had unstrung her nerves, and the strangeness of the place filled her with alarm.

But it was not this that most disturbed her. All minor fears were lost in the terror of one secret and horrible thought; a memory which had made the very sunshine seem hateful, and now haunted the darkness with faces so hideous in their mockery that the child grew well-nigh distraught.

"*We* see; *we* know," said the faces, and then they laughed and mocked, till Viola, falling on her knees beside the window, prayed as she had never prayed in her life before. The face of the earth was changed to her since that afternoon; no prayer, no forgiveness, could restore to the sea and sky their friendly benignity. That was all

gone, and in its stead were terrible accusations and sinister smiles and laughter. That she herself had altered did not occur to her; she was the same Viola, capable always of the crime that she had this day committed; capable always of—she shrank frantically from the horrible word.

As a man fighting with some wild beast for dear life, this child wrestled, in the loneliness of that little sea-haunted chamber, with a demon born within her own consciousness, who assailed her without pause or mercy through all the waking hours of that dreadful night. It seemed as if this Creature—for living form the unspeakable Idea actually took in her distraught imagination—were devouring her inch by inch, her and all that she possessed. Her childhood shrivelled up in the blast of his hot breath; her innocence, her childish dreams, her ignorance of the deepest gulfs of human misery. The gates of the great Darkness were opened to her, and she could already see, stretching far away, the dim, woeful plains and midnight mountains in whose black chasms human souls lay rent and bleeding. The air was heavy with sighing and lamentation.

Upon how many scenes of human agony had those old stones looked down, while the sea sung its eternal requiem to hope and sweet desires? Yet never, perhaps, had they

witnessed a struggle more terrible than the succourless soul-travail of this solitary child—a soul battling in the darkness with the image of a great crime, warding off with vain and desperate efforts the memory of a moment's flash of insane fury,—that moment, which had blazed out upon the very sunshine in hues of flame, fierce and crimsoned with the wild image of—*Murder!*

CHAPTER VIII.

A SYMPOSIUM.

THE news of Philip's accident brought, as Harry said, "a large and fashionable circle" to Caleb's little Hermitage. Mrs. Sedley drove over early in her solemn old carriage to fetch her daughter and inquire for Philip. "Aunt Augusta" and her husband also trundled across country in their more lively vehicle, but delayed their visit philosophically till the afternoon.

Far from philosophic were the fond parents of Philip, who arrived breathless with a captive doctor at an unearthly hour in the morning, and rushed to their son's bedside with a thousand exclamatory questions.

The examination of the injured leg by the doctor was followed by the cheering announcement that it had been perfectly well set, and that with proper precautions there was no reason to fear any permanent injury.

Viola looked on and listened in the deepest anxiety. She shrank guiltily away from Philip's parents, and answered

only by a deep flush when Sir Philip said to her, in rather a severe tone, "I hope this will be a lesson to you not to give way to temper, my child; if it hadn't been for my son's marvellous strength and presence of mind, he would have certainly been killed."

"Indeed, yes," said Lady Dendraith, shaking her head; "passion is a dreadful thing, and always leads to trouble."

There was something ludicrous, if Viola could have seen it, in this plump, well-to-do lady moralising about the evil results of passion; but the child was inaccessible to all ideas of the ludicrous just now; indeed at no time was she very keenly alive to the humorous side of things.

Reluctantly she had to leave the Hermitage and go home with her mother, who promised that she should come and see the invalid as often as the doctor would permit.

Mrs. Sedley did not say a word of reproach to her daughter for her disobedience; she felt that the child had been already severely punished, though she little guessed *how* severely.

The next time that Viola saw Philip he was looking as strong as ever, and complaining bitterly of the restraint still imposed upon him.

"The doctor says I shall walk again as well as ever, for which all praise to '*mon cher philosophe*,' and the rest of you.

Lancaster here behaved like a Trojan. As to the coast-guardsman, he is a true Briton! And Viola—what shall I say of her? Well, she did her very best to make up for pitching me over the cliff in that spirited manner! I can't get over the idea of this mite having actually brought me to death's door! It is really splendid. She will be a fascinating woman when she grows up. It isn't the quiet nondescript women that take one's heart by storm; what we love is life and passion."

"Yes, in other men's wives," said Harry. "In the East, when a woman marries, her father presents her with a sword, which is the symbol of her liberty, and this sword she is expected at once to transfer to the bridegroom, who holds it over her head, making her pass under it as a sign that she promises to be henceforth subject unto him. Whatever is powerful and brilliant we either admire or hate. I leave you to draw your own inferences."

"Thank you," said Philip, "we will."

"And to assist you in the effort," Harry added, "let me repeat a significant remark which I once heard a fellow make about two sisters: the elder, he said, was the girl to fall in love with, the younger the girl to marry. I expect the woman of the nineteenth century is going to make hay of our cherished institutions."

Philip raised his eyebrows.

"Do you really think that the great, badly-dressed old sheet-anchor: our uninteresting but valuable *bourgeoisie,* is going to stand any nonsense about its institutions? Don't imagine it for a moment. The more musty and fusty they are, the more passionately they will be clung to!"

Harry smiled.

"I suppose if our existence were made a little less dull and uncomfortable, the national Bulwark would think we had come to terms with the Evil One himself! Being tied hand and foot like a Gulliver, and generally ill-treated, gives us a sense of moral safeness, and is wonderfully conducive to the serenity of the average conscience. The 'badly dressed sheet-anchor' (a singular figure, by the way) is a trifle thick-headed; we must calculate on that."

Of such conversations was Viola now often the puzzled hearer, for where Caleb was, there, to a dead certainty, discussion would be also. Both Harry and Philip expressed unbounded amazement that he had ceased discoursing learnedly during the time of the accident. That he had not then insisted strenuously on the non-calamitous nature of death was regarded by the two young men as an evidence of singular moderation. His way of treating Viola was a source of perpetual amusement to them. Do what he

would, poor man! he found it impossible to project himself into the consciousness of a being who did not understand the nature of a syllogism, and (if Harry was to be believed) he always addressed Viola with deep respect in the language of "pure reason." That young man used to return to Clevedon after a visit to the Hermitage, and amuse his cousin by describing how Caleb in moments of close-knit argument had turned to Viola with some such remark as, "To this you will at once reply that Kant regards our religious beliefs as either *statutory*, that is, arbitrarily revealed, or *moral*, that is, connected with the consciousness of their necessity and knowable *a priori*"——

This, no doubt, was one of Harry's exaggerations, but the story was not destitute of foundation.

Viola took a keen interest in Kant; why, Harry never could understand. He did not realise the natural avidity with which a starved intelligence absorbs any fresh idea, however unattractive. Mrs. Sedley's careful selection of books for her daughter's reading, had the result of making the child eager for mental food of some other flavour; it mattered little what the food might be, so long only as it was quite unlike the severely wholesome diet on which she had been monotonously reared.

Besides being introduced to Kant, whom she found a pleasant and intelligent person, Viola made the acquaintance of Socrates, or Mr. Socrates, as Philip insisted he must be called, on the ground that "familiarity breeds contempt."

Viola was indignant at the injustice of the treatment he received at the hands of his countrymen; she made him into a hero, and regarded all his utterances as inspired. Harry shocked her greatly by saying, "Well, after all, you know, he is distinctly the greatest bore on record. We should never endure such an old proser now! Think of the way he nagged at those long-suffering people in the Dialogues! I don't wonder that the Athenians resorted in despair to hemlock. As for Xantippe, poor woman! I have always had the deepest sympathy for her. I am certain the man deranged a naturally fine intellect, and destroyed the temper of an angel."

Poor Viola! she scarcely knew what to believe! The mixture of jest and earnest which ran like tangled threads through the whole conversation was most confusing to her. She was utterly unaccustomed to lights and shades of thought, or to quick changes of mental attitude. The three men into whose society she was now thrown opened up a new world of ideas, delightful but bewildering. Caleb's position in the group did not puzzle her as it would have

puzzled an older person, but she was interested to learn that this amazing and indefatigable scholar—battening on the literature of second-hand bookstalls—had been discovered by Harry Lancaster in London in a state of terrible privation; that a friendship had sprung up between the two men, and that, finally, Caleb had been installed by Sir Philip at the ruin, of which he was now custodian, keeping it from falling into utter decay, while he took charge of the stables, outbuildings, and gardens belonging to the empty house.

Sometimes Caleb would propose to make the meeting into a genuine symposium, setting glasses on the table and bringing out a bottle of home-made wine, presented to him, as he informed the company, by his amiable friend Lady Dendraith, and made by her own kind hands.

It was an incongruous group, with an incongruous background, of which Philip, on his couch in Caleb's picturesque kitchen, formed the central figure.

The shadows and sombre colouring threw the four faces into relief. The splendidly handsome features of the invalid formed a fine nucleus to the picture, and Viola's pale questioning face, with its strange melancholy, seemed to correspond to that note of sadness that can be caught in all things human, if we listen for a moment, ever so carelessly.

The eagerness with which she waited on Philip was touching, even to those who did not know her secret; to an onlooker who had guessed that soul-corroding trouble, the whole scene would have seemed no less than tragic. Had her sense of guilt been able to overcome her old dislike to Philip, one source of conflict would have disappeared; but it was not so. After the first rush of pitiful remorse, which had drowned for the time every other sentiment, Viola was again assailed by the old antipathy.

With this she had continually to struggle, and those who have realised the strange intensity of the child's nature will understand what such a struggle implies.

Philip's bantering, familiarly affectionate manner was perpetually stirring up the old angry feelings. A sudden flash of her dark eyes would make him laugh and pretend to cower away as if in fear.

"I'll be good; I'll be good! Don't murder me outright, there's a good child!"

And then the light would die out of her eyes, and she would turn away, perhaps going to the window or to the open door, where she would stand looking out upon the sea.

Mrs. Sedley had permitted, and even encouraged, these visits to the bedside of the invalid, because she regarded

them as acts of atonement. The horror of causing a fellow-creature's death had come so near to the child that she could not fail to be deeply impressed by it.

Philip's recovery was very rapid. As soon as he was able to be moved, his mother bore him off in triumph to Upton Court. That broke up "the symposium," and finished one of the most exciting chapters in Viola's short life. Her visits to Philip were still continued, but at longer intervals, and under conditions entirely changed. She used to bring him flowers as votive offerings; wild flowers that she had gathered in the woods; and sometimes she would shyly offer him some worm or beetle which she imagined must be as valuable in his eyes as it was in hers.

She tried to discover what his soul most yearned for, whether tadpoles or "purple emperors" or piping bullfinches, or it might be a retriever puppy! Then she would spend her days trying to gratify his ambition. On one occasion a round fluffy squeaking object with a damp pink nose was placed in Philip's arms, with the words: "You said the other day that you wouldn't care to live without a retriever puppy; I have brought you one, and you can have four more if you like."

Philip kept the puppy, and said that now he was reconciled to life.

To Viola's delight, Bouncer—grown by this time into a charming, pulpy, blundering creature, with the sweetest disposition—had the honour of being taken up to Oxford when his master returned thither at the commencement of the term.

After that things rolled back to their old course; Viola seldom saw the outside of the gates of the Manor, and she had ample opportunity, in the stagnant solitude of her home, to brood upon the secret that clouded her colourless life. It helped to exaggerate many qualities in her that were already too pronounced, while hastening unduly the maturity of her character.

She made no further attempts to wander out of bounds, and Miss Gripper now seldom caught her climbing trees, or engaged in any other unlady-like occupation. She delivered herself over to the influence of her mother, and about eighteen months after Philip's accident she passed through a phase of fervent religious feeling, during which she rivalled in devotion and self-mortification many a canonised saint. Her mother had some trouble in keeping her from doing herself bodily harm, for in her new-born zeal she preferred tasks that gave her pain, and never thought it possible to be well employed unless the occupation was severely distasteful.

She used now rather to enjoy her father's fits of anger, for they gave her an opportunity of showing a saint-like meekness under persecution. At this time her behaviour was a grotesque caricature of her mother's whole life, but Mrs. Sedley did not recognise the portrait. She rejoiced in her daughter's piety, and half-believed, perhaps, that in the service of Heaven one might fly in the face of mere natural laws (against which Mr. Slater preached such severe sermons) with impunity.

Days and weeks passed on; the daily routine was never altered; the only change that marked the course of time at the Manor-House was the presence of a lady who came daily from the village of Upton to carry on Viola's education.

Miss Bowles was a worthy, conscientious, washed-out person, who had long said good-bye to joy, poor woman! and lived her dim, struggling, dreary life with lady-like propriety.

She scarcely seemed a real human being; she was the incarnated emblem of sound religious principles, Arithmetic for schools, French (with Parisian accent), German (Hanoverian), English Grammar, Composition, and History—all these things and many others Miss Bowles represented;—but try to compound out of them a personality, and miserable was your failure! It lay so deeply buried, so thickly incrusted—like some poor bird's nest petrified in the Derby-

shire springs—that you searched for it in vain. Perhaps a genial, sympathetic person might have warmed it into life once more, but Mrs. Sedley was neither genial nor sympathetic.

Viola applied herself conscientiously to the dry tasks which this lady imposed upon her, associating all that was sapless and without colour in these daily tables of facts and figures, with the neat but certainly not gaudy drab bonnet and pinched-looking jacket of her governess.

Viola was growing now into a slim girl, graceful and swift in her movements, with a reserved, melancholy expression and a rich, sweet voice. Philip Dendraith had prophesied that she would turn out a fascinating woman, but, according to her father, she threatened to be a dead failure.

"How are we going to marry a pale-faced frightened creature like that?" he demanded. "She's only fit for a cloister; and I, for my part, think it's a great pity we haven't got nunneries to send our plain girls to. What's the use of keeping them idling about at home, every one laughing at them because they can't get husbands?"

At such remarks Mrs. Sedley, meek as she was, would wince.

In her simple creed, marriage, no matter under what conditions, was intrinsically sacred, but she would not counsel

her daughter to marry for money; that seemed to her very sinful. Yet she knew well that Mr. Sedley would never tolerate for Viola a poor marriage; he had long been resting his hopes of the restitution of the family fortunes upon his daughter; and without reserve he had told his wife what he expected and what she must exert herself to bring about. The anxious woman watched her child's development with dread; for every day that passed was bringing her nearer to the crisis of her life. And what was the mother's part to be in that fateful moment? Her influence over the girl was supreme: upon her action all would depend.

The responsibility seemed unendurable, the problems of conscience pitiless in the terrible alternatives which they offered to the tortured will.

Suffering, which Mrs. Sedley had borne herself without a murmur, made her tremble when it threatened her child. Yet her teaching to that child was perfectly consistent with the whole tenor of her life: "Endure bravely, and in silence; that is the woman's part, my daughter."

She was ready, with hands that trembled and quailing heart (but she was ready), to give that nerve-thrilled being to the flames—for Duty's sake—and quickly that insatiate woman's Idol was advancing to demand his victim.

Year by year the state of Mr. Sedley's money-matters grew more hopeless, and a possibility which had long been thought of in secret, was at last acknowledged openly between husband and wife. Mrs. Sedley had never seen her husband so deeply moved as when he confessed that they might have to leave the Manor-House, the home where he had lived as a boy, where his father had lived and died, and his ancestors for many a generation. The man who was devoid of sympathy, coarse, brutal, and narrow-minded, was yet moved almost to tears at the prospect of banishment from the home of his race. Sentiment—like a sudden flame in seemingly dead embers—sprang up on this one subject, though it answered to no other charming.

"If it be in any way possible to avoid it, we will not, we *must* not leave the old place," said Mrs. Sedley earnestly.

"There is only one way to avoid it," he replied; "Viola must make a rich marriage."

"Yes; if she loves the man," Mrs. Sedley ventured to suggest.

"Loves—fiddle-de-dee!" cried her husband angrily; "don't talk schoolgirl twaddle to me, madam. What has a well-brought-up young woman to do with love, I should like to know? I have no patience with this spoony nonsense. I call it downright improper. Let a young woman take what's

given her and be thankful. Confound it! it's not every woman that can get a husband at all!"

With these words ringing in her ears, Mrs. Sedley would look with something approaching terror at the sensitive face of her daughter, who, as she grew more womanly in appearance, seemed to become more than ever shrinking and reserved.

Her father shrugged his shoulders angrily.

"Who's going to marry a girl like that?" he would ask contemptuously; "she looks half-asleep."

With her customary want of tact in appreciating character, Mrs. Sedley used to confide some of her anxieties to Lady Clevedon, who scoffed long and loudly, not at Mrs. Sedley, but at Viola.

"Dear me; it's very interesting to be so sensitive!—quite a fashionable complaint among girls nowadays. Too sensitive to marry, too sensitive to be mothers! Is there anything that they are *not* too sensitive to be?"

"You know that I cannot answer you if you speak in this vein, Augusta; but Viola gives me great anxiety."

"My dear, something ought to be done; the machinery of the universe must be stopped; it is too coarse and noisy for these highly-strung beings; they can't stand it. Clearly 'gravitation ought to cease when they pass by.'"

CHAPTER IX.

ALTERNATIVES.

In silence, day by day and month by month, the clouds swept over the Manor-House, and silently the scroll of the years unfolded, revealing little, but hinting many things. Nine times the leaves had fallen since Philip's accident, and Geoffrey had now shot up into a gawky, good-natured youth, and his parents began to cast about anxiously in their minds to find him a profession. His hearty loathing of the drudgery of office-work made the choice difficult. Geoffrey would have preferred the army, but his father swore a great many oaths, and declared that he was not going to be bled to death by a lot of idle sons who couldn't live upon their pay. He had had enough of *that.* Manitoba was bruited (for no congenial work nearer home could be heard of), and this, as an alternative, in case nothing better offered, Geoffrey had come to regard as his destiny. Meanwhile he remained at home, and was understood to be "looking out for something." The intervals between the times of

"looking out" he used to spend in fishing his father's trout-stream, for this was the delight of his soul.

Geoffrey's presence made a great change in Viola's life, and her father began to feel more hopeful about her future achievements, after the boy had driven away the dreary depressed look, and summoned in its place an expression that entirely transfigured the girl's face. Her rich dark skin and black hair, the fine eyes kindling with youthful delights, gave her genuine pretensions to beauty.

It was a sombre beauty; still beauty it was, and of a subtle and haunting kind. During the nine uneventful years which had ushered in her girlhood, Viola had only now and again met either Philip Dendraith or Harry Lancaster. Caleb she occasionally saw. He was still living among his beloved books in the little sea-haunted Hermitage.

Harry had gone to India with his regiment, and Clevedon mourned his exile, and looked forward to his shortly expected return with much joy. Philip was reported to be leading a dissipated life in London, where his good looks, his brilliant prospects, and his undoubted social talents carried all before him. Whenever he was at Upton Court, he made an effort to renew his old acquaintance with Viola, but this was no easy task. Shyness, partly hereditary, partly induced by a solitary life, had become

almost a disease with her, and she used to flee from her fellow-creatures whenever they approached.

For the third time during a three weeks' visit, Philip arrived one afternoon at the Manor-House, and asked for Viola, but she was not to be found. She had seen the visitor arrive, and instantly set off at her utmost speed to the farthest confines of the park, where, shivering with excitement, she lingered for hours and hours, not venturing to go back to the house, in case Philip should still be there. Unfortunately for her, her father happened to be in, and he was so angry when, at last, she did cautiously return, that she thought he would have struck her. She had never seen him so enraged, although outbursts of this sort, after his drinking-bouts, were not uncommon. Fury carried the man out of himself, and he said things which even he afterwards owned were "rather strong." Viola listened in silence. She was learning lessons never to be forgotten to her dying day, lessons which perhaps every woman has to learn in some form or another, but which few are fated to be taught in so many words by their own fathers.

In the name of Heaven and common-sense, how did she expect to get a husband if she behaved in this crazy, addle-headed manner? Half the women in London were ready to throw themselves into Philip Dendraith's arms, and yet

Viola would not condescend to the common politeness of coming to see him when he called! She had run away on purpose, of course; it was an old trick of hers, very girl-like and engaging no doubt, but might one make a polite request that these graceful exhibitions of coyness might not occur again? Coyness was all very well when a man had expressed himself distinctly, but really, before he had made any advances at all, it was what one might call premature.

"You are not a queen of beauty, let me tell you, that you can afford to indulge in these womanish devices. My doors are not besieged with suitors for your hand."

"Not want to marry? Not want to marry?" Mr. Sedley yelled, with a burst of fury. "You—you—miserable little fool! Do you know what you are saying? Can't you speak? Can't you say something instead of standing there before me like a block of wood? Not want to marry indeed! And pray, what do you think would be the use of you if you didn't marry? What can you do but loaf dismally about the place and serve as a wet blanket to every one's enjoyment? What's the good of a woman but to marry and look after her husband and children? What can she do else? Tell me that, if you please. Do you hear me, Viola?"

"I would try and earn my own living," said Viola at last in a low, trembling voice.

"*Earn your own living!*" echoed her father, with a shout of laughter. "Well, that *is* good, upon my word! *You* earn your own living! And pray, in what profession would you propose to become a shining light? The army, the navy, the Church, or the law? Or would you perhaps enter upon the field of politics? Everything is open to you; you have only to choose. And you know so much, don't you? You are so learned and capable, so well able to force your way in the world. Oh! pray don't think of marrying; a far more brilliant and congenial career lies before you."

Viola answered nothing; she was suffering too keenly, realising miserably that in her father's mockery lay a deadly truth; that she had; in fact, nothing to reply but, "Thou hast said it."

What was she? What did she know? What had she seen? What could she do? To all this there was only one answer: Nothing. Books had been forbidden her; human society had been cut off from her; scarcely had she been beyond the gates of her home, except once or twice when she had gone for change of air to Wales or Yorkshire, or for a day now and then to London to see "the sights"!

"O mother, it was cruel!" From the depths of her heart that bitter cry went up, the first word or thought of reproach that had ever arisen there for that much-adored and all-devoted mother. And this was the result of those anxious days, those fervent prayers, that ceaseless self-denial! By her own father, this carefully, anxiously tended child was taunted with her helplessness, and reminded not only that the sole career open to her was marriage, but that she must make deliberate efforts to secure it for herself, or to aid and abet in schemes which others undertook on her behalf. She must bestir herself in the matter, for it was her appointed business.

In after-life Viola learnt about the outcast of her sex facts which at this time were unknown to her; but that revelation was not more painful, nor did it even strike her as very different from what she had learnt to-day about the lot of women who were *not* outcast, but who took upon themselves to cast out others.

The girl's stunned silence irritated her father beyond endurance.

"In the name of Heaven, why can't you speak?" he thundered; "it's your confounded obstinacy; and you get it from your mother. But we have to see yet who is master. Understand that I mean to endure no more of this non-

sense, and the next time you are asked to appear in the drawing-room, you will please to do so, and to make yourself pleasant to the visitor into the bargain. Too much of this accursed nonsense would land you high and dry, a burden to me for life."

Viola drew a quick breath.

"Yes, a burden, a dead weight, hanging like a millstone round my neck. Do you know what a woman is who does not marry? I will tell you: she is a cumberer of the ground, a devourer of others' substance, a failure, a wheel that won't turn; she has no meaning; she is in the way; she ought never to have been born. She is neglected, despised, left out; and who cares whether she lives or dies? She is alone, scorned and derided, without office, without object, without the right to exist,—all doors are closed to her and all firesides forbidden. If you are minded to choose such a lot, at least you shall do it with your eyes open. I tell you a woman is worse than nothing on the face of the earth who is not performing her natural duties, serving her husband and her children. That's what she's made for, and if she doesn't do it she's an absurdity,—a—an anomaly, a ramrod without a gun, a key without a lock, a—a—ship without a sail —she's—she's a DAMNED NUISANCE!" roared Mr. Sedley,

with a final burst of fury, as he turned on his heel and stamped out of the room, banging the door so ferociously that it shook the old house from cellar to roof.

"The master's been drinking again," announced the butler to the inmates of the servants' hall.

It was in the drawing-room that this stormy interview took place; the chill, ghostly old room where the lost souls dwelt and the Spirit of Music held her court. It was a dreary day; Philip had chosen it for his call, thinking that Viola was likely to be home. Outside, old William was weeding the gravel in his usual steady, patient way; the ceaseless chip-chop of his hoe, regular as the dropping of water, sounded forlorn in the silence.

Viola stood for full five minutes exactly where her father left her, with her eyes fixed upon the dull forms of the mist-dimmed trees, upon the melancholy avenue whose few remaining leaves awaited the first breath of wind, to fall shivering to the sodden ground. Then with a low sob she flung herself into the nearest chair and buried her face in the cushions. She was shaken from head to foot, but not a sound escaped her. Grief which finds its easiest expression in tears was reserved for souls less passionate.

There was something frantic in her present distress; she was like a hunted creature at bay. Her position, as repre-

sented by her father's words, seemed utterly unbearable, utterly humiliating.

Why had her parents forced existence upon her if it was to be one long degradation? Better indeed that she had never been born! "Better, ah! better a thousand times," old William's patient hoe seemed to say, as it beat its rhythm on the gravel without; "better, a thousand times, a thousand times!"

With a strange desperate pleasure in self-torture, the girl placed the whole picture clearly before her mind; showing herself exactly how she stood, how helpless she was, how closely the two alternatives of the woman's lot encompassed her. The next time that Philip called, it would beseem her to put on her best frock and her best smile, and try all she knew to charm him. Were not her future prospects dependent on his (or on some man's) favour? Had she not been informed (and in most explicit terms) that her father had no mind to keep her always in his house, and that he expected her to betake herself without delay to her "natural duties?"

The chip-chopping of the hoe had ceased now, but only to be succeeded by the swish-swish of the broom sweeping away the withered leaves.

"I could sweep away withered leaves, or hoe out weeds;

I could dust or cook, or wash, or—or anything that requires only health and strength. I might even be like Miss Bowles and teach, but it would have to be very young children,—I know so little, so little!"

She gave a shiver.

"Until to-day,—O mother, dear mother, I did not even know what it meant to be a girl!"

As a pulse, the broom went beating on the gravel outside, and upon the window-panes struck the first drops of coming rain. A sound of wind among the trees heralded its approach, and presently it arrived; a gush of tears from the sorrow-laden heavens. Old William worked on as if he did not notice it, patiently bending his head to windward, without so much as looking up to see where the rain came from. Viola could bear the sight no longer. She rose, drew up the heavy ill-fitting window, and stood with the rain drifting in upon her face and hair.

"William," she said, "why do you go on working? You will get cold; you will get rheumatism; it is so bad for you. Why don't you go in?"

Old William paused for a moment, and raised himself slightly (only slightly) from his bent attitude, leaning on the handle of his broom.

"The rain don't do me no harm, Miss," he said, with a

slight smile; "I'm used to it. Thomas says I'm to get this gravel done to-night, and Mr. Sedley he wants to see it done; and I'm just a-doin' of it."

"Oh, what does it matter?" cried Viola. "Rheumatism must be so hard to bear."

William gave a sadly knowing shake of the head.

"Ay, that it be, Miss," he said. "I has it so bad at times as I can't scarcely move—the rheumatis' is very bad, very bad indeed. My father, 'e 'ad it dreadful, 'e did; his joints was all gone stiff, and his fingers was all crumpled up like."

"Then it is madness for you to stay out in the rain," urged Viola.

But the old man had not arrived at that highly advanced stage of mental development when things immediate can be balanced against things future. As he had done for years, he went on working in the rain, and endured his rheumatism when it arrived with his usual patience. The act of mind and will necessary to alter his habitual conduct in deference to experience, was beyond him.

All he would do, was to put on his coat, at Viola's urgent entreaty.

There was something in the dim, forlorn lot of this old man that had always filled Viola with sadness, but to-day

she could have taken his hard old hand and kissed it and wept over it in an ecstasy of pity and fellow-feeling.

Had she spoken aloud the words that came welling up into her heart, she would have made old William open his eyes as he had never opened them in his life before.

"Let me come to you and comfort you; let me be a daughter to you; let me work for you and for myself; and then perhaps your lot might be brighter, and then I should not need to seek the favour of any man for the sake of house and home, or to avoid remaining here to be a burden to my father and the world!"

Seldom do civilised men and women speak according to their impulses. They are too well drilled, too discreet; their lives are guided by anything and everything except their own deepest longings and their own soundest reason. Reason may be consulted, but it does not turn the scale. The caprice of others is the most frequent civilised motive, while often mere force of habit will hold people in an old and painful groove for long pathetic years, because they consistently subordinate the great to the little, matters of life and death to some present, importunate, but perfectly trivial claim. Broken hearts, oftener than we think, are the handiwork of feeble heads. As Harry Lancaster had once said, with his usual extravagance, "Give me the

making of the people's intellect, and let who will make their morals!"

When the rain and wind became so violent that old William could not continue his work, he yielded to the logic of events and took shelter in the potting-shed.

The rain was driving in great hissing sheets across the country; the windows streamed, and shook with angry clamour.

Throwing on a cloak and drawing the hood over her head, Viola went out into the storm. She could scarcely make way against it, the wind and rain beat so furiously against her. But she pressed on, seeming to find relief from the tempest of her own feeling in the tumult of the elements. One of the most painful features in her trouble was, that there was no one to be angry with; her whole nature rose in fury against what she felt to be the alternative indignities forced upon her, and yet her anger could not pour itself upon any individual; she could not fling back the insult in his face and be free of it.

It clung to her defilingly, as some slimy sea-weed clings when it loses the sustaining of the water. The consciousness of it was fast saturating her whole being, so that the very texture of her soul was changed.

Struggling blindly on, harbouring a thousand wild

thoughts, her attention was arrested by a low whine, and turning, she saw coming towards her the faithful Bill Dawkins,—a decrepid old dog now, so sadly different from the sprightly poodle of bygone days, "who looked as if the speed of thought were in his limbs!" Quietly and with how sedate a mien Bill Dawkins dragged his slow limbs across the lawn, his ears adroop, his tail no longer quivering (as a compass-needle) with electrical intelligence!

He and old William might have mingled their tears over their rheumatism, for poor Bill also suffered from this cruel malady; and had he been capable of mounting the hill of human thought and overlooking thence the plain of universal destiny, he might, in his pain and discouragement, have made an adaptation of the Japanese proverb and cried gloomily, "If you hate a dog, let him live."

Viola went to meet the limping creature with sorrowful heart.

Such was the end of life, and the beginning——? the rosy, riotous beginning? Of that was Viola herself a shining example!

"Are you coming with me in all this rain?" she asked, as she stooped to stroke the dog, who sat down at her feet and raised his expressive brown eyes to her face.

He looked up at her pleadingly, wistfully, as if he were trying with all his might to speak.

"What is it? What is it?" she asked pitifully. "Are you in pain? Are you miserable and lonely? Are you a burden to the world,—a wheel that won't turn? Does no one care whether you are alive or dead? But, indeed, *one* person does care, and *one* heart sickens at these dumb tragedies that nobody heeds."

She bent down and took him tenderly in her arms—great creature as he was—and carried him into one of the many tumble-down old outhouses where the apples and pears, and the watering-machines and rollers, and a thousand and one odds and ends were stowed away.

The place had a fresh earthy scent, redolent to Viola of subtle memories of childhood, bringing back in sweet overpowering rushes feelings of the bygone days. How many a joyous hour had she and Geoffrey and Bill Dawkins spent in this old shed, potting cuttings, trying experiments (and such experiments!) with the watering-machine—growing instantaneous mustard and cress, eating apples, and indulging in a thousand other pastimes, in all of which the poodle had more or less taken part! There was some straw and a piece of old sacking on the floor, and upon this Viola laid him, covering him up as much as he would

allow her, for he was shivering all over and looked most wretched. He seemed very weak, but he wagged his tail now and again, and he had a heart-breaking way of offering to shake hands at intervals in a feeble, affectionate fashion. There was something in his demeanour besides gratitude; he seemed to have divined that his mistress was in trouble, and was doing his best to comfort her.

Love is one of those lawless emotions that cares nothing for what is "natural" or expected; and Viola's love for this faithful creature did not pause to moderate itself on the reflection that to expend so much time and devotion upon an animal argued an ill-regulated mind.

The good poodle had a personality as distinct as that of any human being, and a more lovable one, human being never had!

Viola was down on her knees beside him, caressing, soothing, speaking loving words, with a desperate feeling in her heart, all the time, that the poor creature was dying.

"It would not be kind to keep you if I could," she said; "but oh! how sad, how sad I shall be without you!"

Almost as if he understood, the dog half-turned and laid his paw, in the old pleading, caressing way, upon

her arm. The next moment he sank down again panting; his body gave a spasmodic twitch, and then lay very still. With a low cry, Viola flung her arms round him passionately, and kissed his shaggy head again and again.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my noblest, kindest, faithfullest friend! Good-bye for ever! and oh that I could tell how I have loved you!"

The dim, beautiful eyes opened slowly; the dying creature looked up with an almost human expression of love and gratitude; then he feebly licked Viola's hand for the last time, and died.

Viola, lying down beside him on the rough straw, sobbed her heart out.

CHAPTER X.

ADRIENNE.

Not many days after Bill Dawkins' death Harry Lancaster arrived in England. His home-coming was a great joy to his mother and sister, who lived at Upton, in a tiny house belonging to Lord Clevedon, about a mile from the home where they had passed their prosperous days before Mr. Lancaster's death. Mrs. Dixie—who had married a second time, and lost her second husband almost immediately afterwards,—had a bland expansiveness about her manner which referred directly to her former glories, just as her old lace and miniatures, and sundry valuable pieces of plate, made eloquent allusion to that past which threw so much effulgence upon her and her only daughter, Adrienne. Adrienne, however, was a cultivated, keen-witted young woman, dainty in ideas as in her person, and she made her allusions to the past with delicacy, and indeed very seldom made them at all. She did not follow her mother's example of wearing unremittingly at her throat, a gigantic ancestor, with pink

cheeks and a light blue coat. Harry used to say of Mrs. Dixie that she was like a gorgeous sunset after a hot midsummer day; the sun and its glories had gone down, but the glow still remained.

"Well, mother, still the lady of the Castle!" he said, not many days after his return. "I declare you wear your vanished crown more royally than ever you did its antitype. It makes me feel like an involuntary Prince of Wales merely to look at you!"

As Mrs. Dixie liked to think that she possessed the "grand air," and as her sense of the ridiculous had its own very exclusive walks in life, she was able to draw up her portly figure with a peculiar wave of the spine presumably characteristic of royalty, while she smiled graciously, down her not perfectly straight nose, remarking, with a sway of the head like that of a poplar in the wind—

"My dear boy, I trust that I am as well able to fill a humble position with dignity as one more elevated. It is not wealth and prosperity that make the lady" (this with an air that beggars description).

Harry gave a queer smile, expressive of so many things that it would be hard to name them all, without making an exhaustive analysis of his character, and that would be a hard task indeed. A few characteristics may, how-

ever, be given. He was contemplative, critical, with an abiding enjoyment of the comedy of life, and a continual consciousness of the great deeps that lay beneath the feet of the players.

It was this eternal mystery of life that gave such a wild zest to the never-ending game, such a ring to the laughter echoing dimly through those dark gulfs,—such wings to the jest and the fancy!

Harry was regarded at the Cottage as a joke personified; his mother used to treasure up his sayings, and repeat them afterwards, minus the point, to her friends, with great pride and pomp.

It was almost impossible to annoy Harry Lancaster, although he was capable on rare occasions of furious anger. The little mortifications that irritate most people, served only as a fresh subject for some ridiculous pseudo-philosophy, on his part; so that in truth he was a very pleasant inmate of any house, for he had an alchemist's gift of turning base little troubles into golden opportunities for laughter. His sister Adrienne, who bore the whole burden of the household and family affairs upon her wise shoulders, used to declare that Harry's presence acted upon her health as a change to the seaside, and that he was the only infallible cure she knew of for headaches.

For the rest, he was more or less of a mystery; no one seemed to know what he thought in his serious moments, or if he had any serious moments at all.

His manner was genial, even gaily affectionate; but the light, nonsensical vein always ran through everything that he said, cropping out unexpectedly in his gravest moments, and constituting a wall of reserve far more impenetrable than mere silence. His air of perfect frankness was most misleading. Brother and sister had been confidants as boy and girl in the early days at "the Palace" before the "Sunset," as Harry called respectively their old home and their change of fortune. Together, in the dusk, they used to talk of the mysteries of life and death, of immortality, of free-will, of good and evil, of the formation of character, and the service of God. Adrienne used often to wonder what her brother thought of these things now, after his man's experience of life. She herself had adopted a more or less conventional view of things in an unconventional way.

She was too clever to be a mere passive echo: thinking for herself within adamantine boundaries, she had now become a refined, elevated, intelligent expositor of current views.

She leant towards ideas of great moral elevation, while

in the regions of the intellect her admiration and capabilities ran towards a certain French *finesse* and sparkle, these qualities being shadowed forth in the daintiness of her dress and the delicate *nuances* of her manner.

Without being pretty, Adrienne was attractive in appearance; she was one of those people whose person cannot be separated in thought from their personality and judged apart. Every movement, every gesture had a certain finish, just as every detail of Adrienne's dress had a definite effect calculated with reference to the whole. The swift pliancy of fancy which was one of Harry's most attractive peculiarities Adrienne shared with him, but there was a singular difference in the manifestation of the same quality in the two characters.

In Harry it suggested a certain largeness and freedom of nature; while in the sister, it expressed fineness, brilliancy, cultivation; but so far from giving the idea of liberty, it implied that of strict limitation. It suggested a nature close-set, concise, with crisp outlines, guiltless of expansive wandering into the untried. Adrienne Lancaster never wandered carelessly into any region. She must be quite sure if she approved of a region before she entered it. There was no reckless touch in her disposition, and under no conditions could one imagine the

quality developing in her. Harry, on the other hand, had it to a dangerous extent; though, so far, it had shown itself in a mere riot of fancy and humour. So alien to Adrienne's consciousness was the attribute, that she even failed to notice it in her brother, closely as she studied him.

It may be supposed that a good-looking young officer, of genial temperament and pleasant manners, became very dear to the village of Upton; and "society" claimed him passionately for its own. The vicar's family was inordinately large, and the prevailing impression left upon the mind after an introduction was of the "eternally feminine," a circumstance which the village thought most unfortunate, for how were all those girls to get married?

How indeed? for though Harry might do his duty as England expected of him, he could not marry the whole contingent of amiable sisters. England would have shown herself ungrateful if he had!

And then, was he in a position to marry even *one* of them? The village feared not, much as it desired to see a break made in the firm ranks of the vicar's charming family. Dick Evans, the eldest son, a pleasant, clever young fellow, now became Harry's frequent companion, though he was scarcely a greater friend to him than Dorothy, the youngest

sister, still little more than a child, a fresh, robust, joyous creature, with bright cheeks and untidy auburn hair, and an incurable love for climbing trees and other unladylike pastimes, in which Harry wickedly encouraged her. She was an amusing proof of the inadequateness of common-sense for achieving reasonable views of life; for Dorothy had, as Harry said, enough of this quality to supply the deficiency of the House of Commons (and he could not say more), yet her ideas on men, women, and things were the most laughter-moving that it had ever been his fortune to encounter.

She was one of those rare beings who are predestined to be happy, to whom "whatever is, is right," in the social world as in nature.

Upton was twelve miles from the Manor, so that Viola, unfortunately, could not enjoy the enormous advantage of knowing intimately a girl so different from herself as Dorothy Evans. Once Viola had been to Upton, and remembered it as a little cluster of thatched cottages with pretty gardens, and one or two old-fashioned houses, which looked so calm and beautiful that it seemed as if the current of life must have been arrested, as if some satisfied Faust had at last said to the passing moment, "Stay; thou art so fair," and the command had been obeyed by Destiny.

It was on a balmy summer's day, that Viola first saw the place, and the picture remained very vividly in her memory. She wondered afterwards if some premonition of what was to come had made her regard it with special interest.

Do not all sensitive men and women feel driven at times to believe that certain places, just as certain people, are fateful for them?—that there is some subtle link which cannot be broken if they would?

Beautiful as it was, Viola had a faint, unaccountable dislike to the village; it seemed like a lovely grave, it was so "hideously serene."

> "No swellings tell that winds may be
> Upon some far-off, happier sea,"

though the sea lay so near, out of sight beyond the undulating downs.

The second time that she saw this place was on the rare occasion of a two days' visit to her aunt at Clevedon. By this time the "demon boy," as Harry called the hopeful heir, had grown up and gone to Oxford, while the girl, who was some years older than Viola, had married, and lived in town,—"prosperous and miserable," according to the same authority.

For a wonder, "Aunt Augusta" had just now only one friend staying with her, a supernaturally stylish lady called

Mrs. Russell Courtenay, who had so much "manner" that Viola was alarmed and overwhelmed—little guessing that this small-waisted being, with her vast assortment of turns and twists and wriggles, her bewildering pranks and gestures, was in reality a prey to shyness, greater if possible than Viola's own.

Lady Clevedon drove her two guests over to call on Mrs. Dixie and Adrienne.

"I hope that Harry will be in, but I don't think it's likely," she said; "he is the most erratic person I know; and I fear he is either walking poor old Mr. Pellett off his legs, undoing Dorothy Evans' careful education, or talking nonsense to that ridiculous creature who poses as a philosopher, Caleb—Caleb what's-his-name?"

"Williams," suggested Mrs. Russell Courtenay, who knew something about literature, but whose memory her unfortunate shyness sometimes confused.

Lady Clevedon treated her suggestion with friendly derision, and Mrs. Courtenay suffered as keenly as if she had had on a shabby dress, or there had been a want of style about her bonnet. Effect was the idol of her soul. She posed, even to herself.

The neat little cottage, covered with wisteria in full bloom, looked radiant this afternoon.

Adrienne, in a dainty but serviceable holland apron, was gardening when the visitors drove up.

Poor Viola! this young woman, too, had "manner," though it was less artificial than Mrs. Courtenay's, and therefore less alarming.

"O Augusta! I am so glad! And Mrs. Courtenay too!" she cried, running to the gate to let them in. "This is heaping coals of fire upon my head; for I ought to have called on you long ago. You must forgive a busy person who has cares of state upon her shoulders. Do come in; my mother will be delighted."

"Adrienne," said Lady Clevedon, "this is my niece, Viola, whose acquaintance you ought to have made long ago. However, better late than never!"

"Better, indeed," said Miss Lancaster, with a pleasant smile. "I scarcely feel like a stranger to you, Miss Sedley, for your name has so long been familiar to me. Alas! those horrid twelve miles between Upton and your place have much to answer for, have they not?"

"A punishment for flying in the face of Providence and living in the country," observed Mrs. Courtenay, with a stylish undulation.

This proposition led to a gay dispute, during which Adrienne conducted the visitors indoors, where they found

Mrs. Dixie indulging (if the truth may be told) in a regal nap, from which, however, she woke with creditable rapidity, and received her guests in what Harry called her best "sunset" manner.

He came in, in the midst of the interview, looking very warm and travel-stained. Adrienne said that a clever geologist might tell exactly where he had been walking by a study of his garments.

"I have been exploring the cliffs with Dick Evans," said Harry.

"Would he not come back with you to tea as usual?" asked Mrs. Dixie.

Harry smiled.

"No; he preferred returning to the Rectory by the back entrance, 'for reasons' (as Mrs. Carlyle says) 'which it may be interesting not to state.'"

Being pressed for explanations, Harry said that Dick had unhappily rolled down a soft chalky incline, and that the general tone of his colouring had been so materially altered thereby, as to make him feel a delicacy about appearing in refined society.

Dorothy had met him in the back avenue, and had been driven, for the expression of her feelings, to roll over and over on the lawn, regardless of the fact that

her mother had never encouraged her in such emotional excesses.

After a burst of laughter, which the mere name of Dorothy was usually enough to call forth at the Cottage, Lady Clevedon laid her hand on Viola's arm.

"Now, Harry," she said, "tell me if you know who this is?"

Harry roused himself, uncrossed his arms, and looked inquiringly from his cousin to Viola. She blushed and smiled a little, and as she smiled, a faint memory of a memory, like a whiff of scent, came to him, and faded away again. He struggled to recall it in vain, and then a thought seemed to strike him.

"Not Miss Sedley?"

He rose with a pleased smile and went over to her.

"I am very glad I came in this afternoon," he said, "for I am most interested to renew our old acquaintance. I have often laughed over that day at the ruin when you were so angry with Philip Dendraith; do you remember? It was splendid the way you fought him. Do you know, I can still see a resemblance to what you were at that time; though you don't look quite so like fighting as you did then," he added, with a smile.

"Oh, I hope I am not so bad-tempered now," she said,

blushing. "I was always very angry if any one behaved unkindly to my dog, and you know Mr. Dendraith *was* unkind to him."

There was a faint, very faint gleam in her eyes even now as she thought of it.

"The old spirit has not died out," Harry said to himself, with a smile; "she thinks it is dead and gone, but some day, when least expected, it will break out again, and in the woman it will mean a good deal more than in the child."

"I suppose you sometimes see your old enemy, now that he is at Upton Court?" Harry continued. "Being a rider, he could get over to you without much trouble, across country."

Harry wondered why Viola blushed again so deeply and so painfully. He was not foolish enough to jump to the usual conclusion in such cases, but he did nevertheless think it possible that the girl had followed in the footsteps of so many of her sex, and lost her heart to Philip Dendraith. In making up their old quarrel, it would be so easy to overdo it. A mere hair's-breadth would take them across the line of mere reconciliation, and Philip was "fearfully and wonderfully" handsome.

Harry felt regretful, almost indignant, at the notion of this possibility. From a worldly point of view Philip would, of course, be a brilliant match; but he was cold,

self-indulgent, cynical, with the same unbending will that he had shown when a mere youth, further strengthened by the easy conquests which it had since brought him. Besides, Harry knew that Philip had lived a life of low and selfish pleasure, only a little more prudently than others, so that, while many of his companions had gone to wreck and ruin altogether, he was still prospering.

But this cold prudence which had saved him, was no ornament to his character in his critic's eyes. Viola married to such a man was almost unthinkable, and yet (Harry said to himself) Society is every day bringing about these inconceivable things. The woman marries and gives no sign; no one knows how the unthinkable is worked out in daily detail.

He studied the face beside him with interest. It attracted him far more than many a girlish face which he would have called pretty, and have forgotten again the next minute. Was Viola pretty? He did not quite know. The appeal that her face made was new in kind, and had to be considered. She had a very dark skin, and her colouring when she blushed was rich and fine. The face gained upon one rapidly; it was a haunting face—yes, certainly it was pretty;—very pretty. What had come to him? It was *beautiful!*

Harry drew his hand across his eyes, as if he thought they had deceived him, but no; in a little over twenty minutes, during which the conversation had been upon quite trivial topics, these changes of impression had taken place in him, and the face which he had hesitated at first to call pretty had acquired in his eyes an unaccountable charm.

"I suppose not very much has happened at your home since I left," he said, musingly. "It is just the same here. I go away, for years; a thousand things happen to me; I see hundreds of new faces, new scenes: I have many experiences great and small,—and I come back to find precisely the same life going on as when I went away. I ask what has happened; and I am told that old Sally is dead, and so-and-so is married; that a new window has been put in the church, and that Lady Clevedon has built a wing to the schoolhouse! But I suppose these are very important matters after all," Harry added, remembering that such interests were all that Viola possessed.

"I know very little of what goes on outside my own home," she said. "I go to visit the people in our village with my mother sometimes, but I don't like it; I never know what to say, and I feel intrusive and uncomfortable. The people always talk to mother about their Heavenly Father"—Viola hesitated a little, for a sudden suppressed

smile had flitted across Harry's face, a smile not to be hidden by the moustache which Adrienne used to say endeared him to his fellow-creatures so inexpressibly.

He looked very grave the next minute, and expressed great interest in Viola's account of her district-visiting.

"My mother gives the cottagers soup and blankets, and she reads the Bible to them," Viola continued, drawn out of her reserve by something simple and genial in Harry's manner which no one had yet been able to resist. His dramatic faculty of entering into all varieties of human feeling gave him a power over his fellows, different from, but perhaps not less remarkable than Philip Dendraith's. It was irksome to him to have to retire into the limits of his own personality; he preferred to explore that of others. The simple, firm outlines of Viola's character, and its intense concentration, formed an attractive study to a mind so entirely opposite in type.

"And do you think the villagers like to have the Bible read to them?" he inquired gravely.

"Of course," said Lady Clevedon, overhearing the question; "there has been established an intimate relation, of the nature of cause and effect, between the Bible and port wine, which is very favourable to the propagation of the Gospel among the labouring classes in this country."

"Augusta, you are really very naughty!" cried Mrs. Russell Courtenay, with one of her favourite wriggles. "This fresh innocent mind will lose its bloom if the young ears are assailed with such ideas."

"Oh! she had much better listen to me than to Harry," said Lady Clevedon; "I think he really must be 'The Ambassador Extraordinary' (you know the book?)"—(Mrs. Courtenay murmured, "Oh yes.")—"He has all the plausible exterior of that emissary, and I can vouch for the Satanic character of his sentiments. I thought India would have cooled him down"—("Not a usual result of the climate," threw in Adrienne)—"but instead of that he is worse than ever!"

"*You* seem to have been able to draw him out," said Mrs. Dixie, a little annoyed; "he never tells *us* what he thinks. I suppose he doesn't consider us capable of understanding him."

"Oh! nonsense," cried Lady Clevedon; "he wisely shrinks from your criticism."

"This is crushing," said Harry, lazily. "I wonder why it is that a peaceable fellow like me should always be attacked. 'Can you fight?' 'No.' 'Then come on.' That is how the world treats me! And yet I smile forgivingly upon it.

'She was more than usual calm ;
She did not give a single damn,'"

he murmured, softly quoting.

"Mr. Lancaster, Mr. Lancaster!" cried Mrs. Courtenay, "*respectez l'innocence.*"

"I beg your pardon?" said Harry, bending towards her in courteous inquiry.

"*Respectez l'innocence,*" repeated the lady, with increased emphasis.

"Might I ask you to repeat the phrase once more?"

Mrs. Courtenay lost her presence of mind.

"I said you should respect innocence, Mr. Lancaster."

"Oh! I always do," said Harry, with an air a little shocked that the lady should have thought it necessary to recommend so obvious a duty. "Lives there a soul so black"——

"Now, Harry, no more of your nonsense," said his cousin ; "Mrs. Courtenay isn't used to you yet, and she must not be badgered. When are you coming over to see us? And you, Adrienne? Now don't say you are busy ; people needn't be busy unless they like. Business is the mark of a feeble mind. Come over soon, while Viola is with me ; you must get to know each other. I am going to make her stay longer.—No, my dear, you needn't talk about your mamma,—your mamma will have to do as she

is told. I explain to her that it's exceedingly bad for a girl to be shut up and never see a living creature. Harry, I give you *carte blanche* to badger *her* as much as you like; it is just what she wants. Viola, then, will stay with me for the next week—(be quiet, my dear!)—and you will all come over and have some tennis, or anything you like—let me see—(the Featherstones are coming to-morrow)—say on Wednesday, then. So that's settled. No, Adrienne, excuse me, you have nothing whatever to do. Australian letters? Nonsense. Haven't got a dress? Borrow one of your mother's."

"Or," suggested Harry, "adopt the idea of the poor woman whom a narrow-minded world condemned to a madhouse because she insisted on wearing costumes made out of advertisement sheets of the *Times* on week-days, and brown-paper on Sundays."

"If they were well made, I am sure they would look very effective," said Mrs. Courtenay.

"But, alas! they would have a fault quite fatal in this age of the Worship of the Golden Calf," said Adrienne in a tone which only to Harry betrayed its latent bitterness. "No one could stand before them and exclaim—like Mrs. Carlyle's maid before the pictures at the National Gallery—"How expensive!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

WHEN brother and sister arrived at Clevedon on the Wednesday as arranged, Harry felt a pang of disappointment at seeing his cousin only, and Mrs. Russell Courtenay, on the tennis-ground.

"Your niece is gone, after all?" he asked.

"Oh no, she is coming presently; she is so absurdly shy that I could not persuade her to be here when people arrived. Most ridiculous! She is going to slip in presently, when you are all engaged in tennis, and thus escape observation.

Harry opened his eyes.

"How very painful it must be to be so shy!" said Adrienne, who was standing near.

"Oh! it's absurd," cried Lady Clevedon impatiently. "Poor child!" she added, laughing, "her misery every evening when she has to talk to my husband is something quite pitiful! You know he is a little stiff and formal, and

this frightens her beyond description. It's the most diverting thing in the world to see him at dinner, with Mrs. Courtenay sparkling and undulating on one side of him, and Viola blushing on the other; Arabella trying with all her might to be fascinating, Viola trying as hard to sink into the earth!"

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Harry, laughing. "She didn't strike me as so very shy as all that, the other day when she called."

"Oh! well, you and my husband are not exactly the same people; nobody ever is shy with an absurd, lounging, easy-going creature like you."

"Thanks," said Harry.

"I half-expect Dick Evans and Dorothy this afternoon, and perhaps Philip Dendraith. *Entre nous*, I fancy he rather admires Viola; so I thought they might as well have an opportunity of meeting."

"Augusta!" cried Adrienne. "*You* condescending to the *rôle* of matchmaker."

"Nonsense; I am doing nothing of the kind; but Viola really needs to be drawn out of herself, and I think Philip is a very good person to do it. If he admires her, he will probably succeed better than most people. Viola is a girl who couldn't flirt if she tried, so I am not afraid of starting

any silly affair of that sort. I simply want to give her a little experience and *savoir-faire*, and a polished man of the world like Philip Dendraith is exactly the instrument for my purpose; don't you think so?"

"I have no doubt you are right," said Harry slowly; "he is certain to teach her *something*, at any rate, but what that will be is another matter. Do you think his admiration is at all serious?"

Lady Clevedon shrugged her shoulders. "How can one possibly know that about a man like Philip? His heart must be pretty well seasoned after all his experience, and he's not likely to lose it in a hurry to any woman—to Viola least of all. What do you think of her, by the way?"

Harry hesitated.

"Just so," said Lady Clevedon. "But she will improve. Her bringing up has been so much against her. Her devoted mother has been the ruin of all that family. Poor Marion! what a life she has had of it! More than half her own fault too. She is really never content unless she is in trouble. I assure you it's a fact. Now it's money-matters, now it's household tragedies, now it's her husband's health, now it's those graceless sons. At present Viola is the source of woe."

"What does she do to cause anxiety?"

"My dear Harry, she lives; that is enough for Marion. Of course the results of the girl's training are beginning to show, and her mother is quite surprised! Really, the foolishness of women is something quite amazing! Talk about female suffrage indeed! I'd rather enfranchise the madhouses and the asylums; yes, and the clerical profession!" added Lady Clevedon, with a laugh.

"Does Mrs. Sedley regret her daughter's painful shyness?" inquired Adrienne.

"She sees that she is too 'sensitive,' as she calls it, and too quiet for a healthy girl of her age. Viola shows a singular preference for her own society, which *I* should say was anything but entertaining. Her mother declares that she *thinks*——" Lady Clevedon laughed. "The motherly ingenuity of the idea is quite charming! When I am not angry with Marion she delights me. Poor woman! She came to me almost in tears the other day, because she said Viola had got it into her head that she wanted to earn her own living! It was really too funny! I sat and laughed till I could laugh no longer, and poor Marion looked on without a smile; and when I had finished she repeated the thing over again, in exactly the same tone of extreme concern; and if Arabella hadn't come meandering in at the moment, I don't know what would have happened."

"Why does Viola want to earn her own living?" asked Adrienne.

Lady Clevedon shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear, why does she blush if you speak to her suddenly? Why does she allow her mother to dress her in pale lavender sprigs on a white ground?"

"She ought to make a stand for brown paper," said Harry.

"Infinitely preferable!" cried his cousin. — "Well, Dorothy, so you have managed to come. That's right. Who are you going to annihilate this time, with that vindictive-looking racket of yours?"

A tennis-set having been arranged between Dorothy and Harry Lancaster on the one side, Dick Evans and Adrienne on the other, the players took their places, Dorothy panting for the fray. Dick was a stoutly-made, reddish-haired young fellow, with a decided, intelligent manner, and a pleasant smile. His capacious head, with square, scientific brow, indicated the direction of his powers. He had that "sublimated common-sense," that power of drawing accurate deductions from closely observed data, which, when highly cultivated, marks, according to Professor Huxley, the scientific intellect. His tennis-playing was eminently scientific, "screws" being very plentiful in his "service," as was

evident from Dorothy's frequent use of the "language of imprecation."

During the game Philip Dendraith arrived in tennis-costume, and joined Lady Clevedon and Mrs. Courtenay in the shade of a beech-tree, where they were sitting, watching the battle.

He was even handsomer than in the old days when Viola first knew him. His figure had filled out, giving him a more manly look; his manner, always polished, was now as perfect as any manner can be that does not take its rise in warmth of heart and wealth of sympathy. He was a man whom Sir Roger de Coverley would have censured very severely, for preferring the reputation of "wit and sense" to that of "honesty and virtue." He would have counted among those who, according to that moralist, deserve hanging: those men who are continually "offending against such quick admonitions as their own souls give them, and blunting the fine edge of their minds, in such a manner that they are no more shocked at vice and folly than men of slower capacities."

Philip Dendraith had certainly never been shocked at vice in his life, and at folly he laughed. He could listen to a tale of cruelty without the slightest thrill of anger against the perpetrator of the deed, or of pity for the

sufferer. It never seemed to strike him to imagine himself in the place of the victim; he took his stand among the powerful, and had no fellow-feeling for the weak, whether weak through circumstance or by nature.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your picturesque appearance," he said, as he raised his cap to the two ladies; "I feel as if I were about to take an unworthy part in a 'Watteau.' The blue-green foliage behind you makes a most characteristic background."

"Oh! it's only the *background*," cried Mrs. Courtenay, gaily aggrieved; "we were flattering ourselves that *we* formed the attraction of the picture."

"Nor were you deceived," said Philip; "there could be no doubt of *your* efficiency, but the background *might* have failed; therefore I mentioned it."

"Mr. Dendraith always manages to wriggle out of a difficulty somehow," said Mrs. Courtenay, laughing.

"He more generally *walks* out of it, I think, Arabella.—Well played, Dorothy! Adrienne, you must bestir yourself! Did you ever see anything like the energy of that child? Her whole soul is in the game!"

Dorothy certainly was worth watching, as she sprang now to this side, now to that, her auburn hair flying behind her, her cheeks flushed, her blue eyes sparkling. Her

excited exhortations to her partner, her angry self-reproach if she missed a ball herself, her despair at Dick's impossible "service," were all noted with amusement by the onlookers.

"I wish I could see Viola losing herself like that in a game," cried Lady Clevedon.

"I thought your niece was to be here to-day," said Philip.

"So she is. I don't know why she doesn't come out."

"I will go and lead the lamb to the slaughter," said Mrs. Courtenay.

"Only once have I seen Miss Sedley since I have been at Upton," Philip observed, when Mrs. Courtenay was gone. "I have called three or four times at the Manor-House, but till Saturday last she never appeared, and when she did, I could only get a few monosyllables out of her."

"You must remember that she has scarcely been outside the gates of her home all her life, poor child!"

"She has the makings of a charming woman," said Philip; "there is a peculiar quality about her, not easy to describe, but it is very powerful. There is something about that particular kind of coldness that suggests hidden fire, and women of that type are always attractive. I want to make way in your niece's good graces, Lady Clevedon. She quite takes my fancy, upon my word."

Something in Lady Clevedon's movement of the eyebrows

made Philip hasten to add, "Not that there's anything astonishing in that; I have no doubt Miss Sedley is universally admired."

The lady's half-satirical bow was followed by an amused exclamation; for, crossing the lawn, came arm-in-arm, as if on the closest terms of confidence, Mrs. Russell Courtenay and Viola: Mrs. Courtenay chattering vivaciously into her companion's ear, as she leant over her; Viola as straight as a monument, suffering—all unwillingly—the sprightly Arabella to wreathe herself about her, after the fashion of some fantastic climbing plant.

"You have chosen your co-visitors with infinite discretion," observed Philip, with a thin smile.

"Yes; they are a delicious pair! And, would you believe it, one is almost as shy as the other. Well, Viola, weazled out of your hole at last! You have lost the best half of the afternoon over your headache."

"Have you a headache?" asked Philip, in a tone of concern. "I think it is very good of you to give us a glimpse of you at all, in that case."

He spoke in the low, flattering tones that most women find so fascinating, and of which no one could fail to feel the charm. Viola looked up; it sounded so exactly as if he were sincere.

His dark eyes, fixed admiringly upon her, gave no further clue to his meaning. If ever eyes were given to conceal the thoughts, Philip Dendraith's were bestowed on him for that purpose. The mystery was *piquant.*

"Oh! Mr. Lancaster, what *are* you about?" Dorothy's voice rang out in dismay. "That ball would have been out a long way if you hadn't taken it!"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Harry. "I'm afraid it has lost us the set."

And it had. The players came up from the tennis ground (Dorothy disconsolate), and joined the "Watteau" group under the beech-tree.

"You seemed rather to lose your head at the last," Philip said, addressing Harry, with a rather keen look in those inscrutable eyes of his.

"Impossible!" returned Harry, flinging himself on a scarlet rug at Mrs. Courtenay's feet. "I haven't such a thing to lose."

"Our dear Mr. Lancaster, if we are to take his word for it, has run all to heart," said Arabella.

"He had better look out and not lose that, into the bargain," observed Dick, "or he'll have nothing left to guide him."

"Except the advice of my friends, and that is always plentiful," said Harry.

"A man minus both head and heart is such a rarity that he might possibly also distinguish himself from the common herd by consenting to take it," observed Philip.

"Not he," threw in Harry; "it requires the full powers of both those organs to persuade a man that the rest of the world are not all bigger fools than himself."

"A curious use to put head and heart to," observed Dick;—"self-dethronement!"

"The highest human achievement, I assure you," said Harry, but whether from conviction or, as Philip said, "out of pure cussedness," no one could determine.

Adrienne looked at him inquiringly in vain.

"That is the ever-beautiful doctrine of Renunciation in a new form," she said, seriously.

"Yes," Mrs. Courtenay chimed in; "always sacrificing ourselves for others, don't you know?—of course, that is so Christian, isn't it?"

"Well, no, pardon me, I don't think it is," said Harry. "I wish that people would give up this inveterate habit of indulging in moral austerities at their neighbours' expense! If they would only be kind enough to leave themselves and their moralities alone, and to take the trouble to acquaint themselves with a few of the simplest facts bearing upon human well-being—were it but the principle of the common

pump or of the garden-engine—their friends would have something to thank them for!"

"Oh dear, *do* you think so?" cried Arabella, looking round in a fascinating manner for encouragement. "Oh! but I think we all ought to try and be unselfish, don't you know?"

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you," returned Harry, with his usual perverse instinct to exaggerate his own dissent. "I think we ought all first to try not to be blockheads. I know it's a very hard saying; far harder than 'Renounce' or 'Surrender;' but it rings truer, and stands the test of experience better than all the self-effacing doctrine which condemns the individual (and therefore the race) to the ridiculous position of the egg-and-bread-crumbed whiting, whose energies, arguing in a circle, are employed in industriously devouring his own tail!"

"Listen to him!" cried Arabella.

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!" murmured Philip, at which there was a chuckle from Harry and a laugh from the others, Viola and Dorothy excepted.

"Now, Mr. Dendraith;" cried Arabella, "do tell us what you think about it. I confess I belong to the old school in this matter, and prefer the humble office of the whiting

(though it *may* be rather foolish) to the enlightened selfishness that Mr. Lancaster so ably advocates."

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"I fear I shall shock the company when I say that my idea of life is, to make myself comfortable, and only injure my neighbours as much as is necessary to serve that important end. I may add that I differ from most people in this matter, merely in regard to frankness."

"I call that quite shocking," cried Mrs. Courtenay; "but it's very like a man."

The last clause was added indulgently, as if it cancelled the first.

"It is," said Harry, "the doctrine that most men practise. To oppose it we have, unluckily, no well-grown, robust, unblinking gospel which bids us seek the good, not so much of an abstract humanity, as of individual men and women—we have only a sickly morality addressed to the little personal righteousness, or desire for righteousness, of each candidate for heaven; so that in the midst of a predatory society, where all must suffer more or less, we possess little or nothing to work against this dangerous form of self-seeking but a few of those absurd and heroic whitings painfully eating their own tails! As well try to cure the world's evils with a set of dancing dervishes!"

"I say, Dorothy, what do you think of all this heresy?" asked her brother.

"Oh! Mr. Lancaster is always saying some extraordinary thing that nobody else says. It doesn't matter," said Dorothy cheerfully, at which there was a universal shout of laughter at Harry's expense.

"I am sure you are quite wrong," cried Adrienne; "you are working against the noblest spirit of the age, and plucking the highest motive out of the hearts of our most devoted men and women."

"I deny it," said Harry; "I say to them only: 'In the name of humanity, don't mistake mere self-mutilation for the service of man; don't devour yourselves from overmuch righteousness; the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. You are a link in the chain of the general life, and your first business is to see that it is a good one. In the name of Heaven, not the whiting-trick!'"

Adrienne shook her head.

"A dangerous doctrine," she said; "too flattering to our innate self-love."

"That is a personal view of the matter," returned Harry, obstinately, "and shows the flaw in your doctrine. You care, after all, more for your own virtue than for the good of others, which claims to be the whole object of renunciation.

This is irrational, self-contradictory. A personal righteousness that does not conduce to your own and others' greatest welfare is, to my mind, a mere toy, a doll stuffed with sawdust which you hug to your mistaken bosom. We shall have to throw away our dolls, for they are all fetishes; yes, even our new, ingenious, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed doll with the sweet expression, who says, 'Papa, mamma, no jam for me; jam for Tommy!'"

The idea of this ingenious creature amused Dorothy, and her comments on the subject shortly reduced the assembly to a frame of mind entirely unsuited to the discussion of ethical questions.

Their thoughts returned to tennis, and several sets were arranged, in one of which Viola was induced to play, with Philip for her partner.

After it was over he suggested a stroll round the garden, and Viola, too shy to dissent, made a sign of acquiescence.

Every detail of that miserable interview with her father returned to her memory as Philip, with flattering deference, led her round the beautiful old gardens, where the sun was drawing the rich scent from the roses and filling the air with a glory that can only be compared to that happiness which is said to visit none but the loftiest souls,

and these only brushes lightly with its wings, as if an angel were passing on his heavenward way.

"I ought to smile and flatter and try to charm this man," the girl was saying bitterly to herself; "that is my business as a woman,—otherwise"——

But Viola did not smile, except undesignedly sometimes when Philip's amusing talk entertained her against her will. She maintained a politely cold demeanour, appearing a little to lose her shyness in the yet stronger feeling of womanly pride.

The old childish dislike to this man had of course lost its venom, but the memory of it was not without its influence on her present feelings, and these were further complicated by the knowledge of the momentary murderous impulse which had so nearly caused her enemy's death. The desire of atonement was still present.

Philip, who, according to his habit, led the way and decided details, discovered a pleasant sequestered spot among the windings of the shrubberies, where there was a seat, and here he suggested that they should rest and meditate.

The spot seemed consecrated to the Goddess of Indolence, so warm and still and lazy was the air, so sleepy were the sounds of the humming bees and droning

insects. Viola sat down, while Philip, finding the seat too cramping, asked permission to lie upon the grass at her feet.

"Now this is what I call true philosophy," he said lazily; "the man that knows not how to be idle knows not how to live."

"Most people know how to be idle, I think," said Viola.

"Pardon me, but I believe there are very few. Italians understand the art, but the Teutonic races are burnt up with a fire of action that makes our country the most glorious and the most uncomfortable in Europe."

"Only just now Mr. Lancaster was saying that ours is the only language which has the word *comfort* in it at all," said Viola, falling into the trap that her companion had set for her.

"Yes; we have comfort in our chairs and tables, perhaps," he said, "and that is no small matter; still it is not everything. We eat well and sleep softly, but how dearly we pay for these things! Is there not something a little incongruous in the idea of a man toiling hard all his life to enable him at last to buy an easy-chair?"

Viola smiled, and Philip smiled too, but in quite a different fashion. He saw clearly enough that the girl had no intention of paying the usual tribute to his good-

looks and brilliant prospects, but the omission only attracted him. He was tired of girls who could be had for the asking, and less.

It would be a delightful task to kindle those beautiful eyes with an unknown emotion, and to make the proud heart beat more quickly in its owner's despite. That would be a victory worth having; an intoxicating tribute to his power and skill and fascination.

Philip had scarcely believed in the existence of a girl totally uninfluenced by worldly considerations, but he was half-disposed to forswear his customary cynicism in Viola's favour. He was too keen to be uncompromisingly cynical. He saw, too, that in order to arouse in her the feelings he desired to arouse, her ideas must first be led to impersonal subjects, so that her present hostility might be lulled.

His studies of human nature made him calculate that hostility was a better ground to work upon than indifference. Hostility implied feeling, and feeling was always fruitful. Again, women's hostility was of a passionate, unfounded order, that might just as reasonably be amity; therefore it was capable of transformation.

Philip did not think all this out in so many words; the ideas floated through his mind, as idly as the flies drifted through the atmosphere, while all the time he went on

talking, waiting at intervals for Viola's answers, and treating them, when they half-unwillingly came, with a deference that was very flattering, in a man of his experience and acknowledged power.

Her expression had begun to change already; she was forgetting herself in what he was saying, and Philip now found a new and *piquant* charm in the face; so much so that he began to wonder if he should be able to keep up the judicial spirit of the experimenter, while he sought to summon expressions yet more beautiful into the deep eyes and the proud, sweet lips. The doubt did not at all detract from the interest of the pastime.

After a time, he ventured to leave the impersonal topics which had served their purpose so well, and to broach the subject of the past and its memories.

"How you used to hate me in those days!" he said, with a sigh. "It was really rather strange, I think, for I used to be quite fond of you, and one imagines that love begets love, does one not?"

"I have never forgiven myself for what I did," said Viola, "and the memory of it haunts me to this day."

"My dear Miss Sedley, you distress me!" cried Philip, raising himself on one elbow; "I had no idea you took the matter so seriously."

"I have reason to," she said, shaking her head.

"But nothing happened," he argued. "Here I am, all safe and sound, and uncommonly jolly (especially at this moment) into the bargain."

"No thanks to me," said Viola.

"Yes; for present mercies, thanks to you particularly," he returned.

She looked at him with a puzzled air. Could he really care, however slightly, for her society, he who had travelled all over the world and mingled with the brilliant and the beautiful of all countries? She gave a faint movement of the shoulders, as if she abandoned the problem in despair. But the conversation, the mere presence of an intelligent human being to one in her monotonous circumstances, was sufficiently intoxicating, without the aid of flattery.

"If you still reproach yourself for that old offence," Philip continued, "I think it is high time that it should be expunged from the list of your sins. I will forgive you—there's my hand on it—and now you have no excuse for thinking of it any more."

"Oh! but you don't know, you don't know!" cried Viola, drawing away the hand he had endeavoured to take. "I can't let you forgive me in ignorance of my offence."

Philip looked astonished.

"Do tell me what you mean," he pleaded; "I thought I did know your offence, such as it was. I suppose you didn't attempt to put prussic acid in my medicine, or resort to perfume-poisons, after the manner of the Borgias? If you did, upon my honour, you would be an entrancingly interesting person!"

"Interesting because I was criminal!" cried Viola.

"In this age of mediocrity even crime becomes interesting, not because it is crime, but because it is dramatic. There is a craving for the dramatic in these days, for the all-sufficient reason that we are doomed to lives of such monotonous respectability. The Philistines seem determined to make things so deadly dull that they drive us into extravagant excesses, for the mere sake of relief. The poor man takes to drinking because his home is detestable; the rich man plunges into dissipation because irritating social laws make respectability unbearable. I fear I startle you, Miss Sedley; but if you think over what I have said, I believe you will come some day to admit that there is truth in this view."

He certainly *had* startled her!—*Respectability unbearable!* Had she heard aright? The world was seized with an attack of vertigo; Good had flung its arm round the

waist of Evil, and the two were waltzing together as if they had been partners in the dance from time immemorial.

She scarcely understood what Philip meant by social laws; she "could not see the town for houses." She had passed her whole life under the shadow of these laws, and was unable to conceive a state of things where they were absent or different. In any case, she felt it her duty to struggle against the thought that Philip had suggested.

She did not believe that he was a good man, and therefore it was necessary to be on her guard against his cleverness.

"But a truce to these heresies," said Philip, with a smile, guessing her state of mind; "I want to hear your confession. I assure you of my forgiveness beforehand, if that is of any value in your eyes. Now tell me; what was the secret enormity of which you were guilty at the time of my accident?"

"You talk lightly of the matter, because you don't believe I could be guilty of"——

She hesitated and coloured painfully.

"Let me help you," said Philip, more and more interested. "You really *did* put poison in my medicine?—is that it?"

"Oh! no, no, not so deliberate as that," said the girl, thrusting away the idea as if it were something tangible;

"but when you were sitting at the edge of that window in the ruin, you remember, and you made me so angry;—well, for a moment, as I flung myself upon you, I—I actually meant to—push you over if I could. It was a moment of insanity, but a thousand lifetimes could not blot it out; it is there now and for all eternity!"

Philip looked up at her, deeply pondering.

By some instinct that comes at the right moment to born rulers of men, he felt that he ought not to make too light of this matter. Viola's sense of guilt gave him a valuable handle by which he could work upon her feelings. He looked away without speaking, and allowed the silence to prolong itself painfully.

"You don't think me 'interesting' for committing a crime when it comes to the point," said Viola at length, fixing her eyes straight before her.

Philip heaved a long sigh.

"Believe me, I admire the force of character that prompts to vigorous actions, but—I confess I am sorry and surprised to learn this of you."

Smarting under the implied reproach, Viola was yet almost relieved to find that he did not really take a light view of the matter. Philip's instinct had been faultless.

"At the same time you must not forget that you were

a mere child at the time, and therefore not responsible. Such an impulse would be impossible to you now."

"Oh! yes, yes, I hope so; but that memory makes me frightened of myself. I don't know what may be in me."

"It will be interesting to find out," muttered Philip, more to himself than to her.

As he spoke the sound of footsteps disturbed the serenity of the scene, and Philip made an impatient gesture.

"Hang it! there are the others."

But it was only Mrs. Russell Courtenay and Harry, who were taking a stroll round the garden together.

"Oh! here you are!" cried the lady. "How comfortable you look! Mr. Dendraith, I do think you are the laziest person I ever met."

"Do you not know the wisdom of the Persians, Mrs. Courtenay, who say that you should never walk if you can ride, never ride if you can sit, and never sit if you can lie?"

"And never live if you can die, they ought to add," said Harry, "if they wish to be consistent."

"I expect they don't, though," returned Philip. "Miss Sedley and I have been talking over old times," he went on, "and we have come to the conclusion that the past is a mistake, and that there is no time like the present."

As this was a sheer invention on the spur of the moment, Viola looked at him in astonishment.

"Miss Sedley, you really make a very bad conspirator," he said, laughing. "You don't enter into the spirit of the creative genius at all; you should never stare in a thunderstruck manner at such a simple *jeu d'esprit.* I assure you it is disconcerting in the highest degree."

"Don't spoil that beautiful innocence!" cried Mrs. Courtenay. "Mr. Lancaster, I think our motto is '*excelsior*,' is it not?"

"That motto is my aversion," said Philip.

"Well, good-bye, and I do hope you won't propound any more heresies to Miss Sedley. I don't know what her mamma would say."

"Wouldn't it be pleasant to go for a stroll too?" Viola suggested. "The great heat is over now."

"What, you too tormented with this disease of energy!" cried Philip. "So be it, then; let us away. Your will, of course, is my law."

CHAPTER XII.

A WORKING HYPOTHESIS.

PHILIP DENDRAITH had never been troubled with shyness. He did not hesitate to present himself every day at Clevedon, openly telling his hostess that her house had so many attractions to offer an idle man that she must take the consequences. He made no secret of his desire for Viola's society, singling her out with flattering persistence, and putting forth all his powers of fascination. She had begun to exert a very potent spell over him, rather to his own dismay. As for Viola, her manner was already improving under the influence of the new experience. The first coat of paint had been laid on, as her aunt said.

When Harry called one afternoon, he found, to his annoyance, that Philip was, as usual, among the group under the beech-tree on the tennis-ground.

He and Viola were standing a little apart, Viola playing nervously with a bunch of June roses.

"Do you remember," Harry heard him say to her—"do

you remember, yesterday afternoon, that you dropped a rose you were wearing, and you walked back along the way you had come in hopes of finding it?"

Viola gave a gesture of assent.

"I had not the courage then to confess my sin (let us repeat our stroll of yesterday, by the by), but it lies heavy on my conscience, and I am come to-day to ask absolution. Here is the lost treasure."

Harry saw him bring out of his breast-pocket a withered rose, just as the two figures turned a corner and disappeared into the shrubberies.

He would have given worlds to hear what followed.

When they presently returned, the rose was still in Philip's hand. What did that mean? Had he obtained absolution and leave to keep the rose as his own? or had she treated the whole incident as too trivial to notice? For the first supposition Viola seemed too repellant; for the second, too shy. As often happens in life, circumstances must have obliged her to do violence to one side or other of her nature.

Harry pondered deeply upon the state of affairs: he half-suspected that Lady Clevedon had been urged by her brother to bring about a marriage between Viola and the heir of Upton Court. For Viola it would surely prove

most disastrous. She was as a bird in the hands of the fowler. Philip's power was of a cold and watchful order, not to be gainsaid. Perhaps in the long-run her force of character might be no less than his, but it was of a different kind. She was open to pain, while he was almost insensible. He was a man, she was a woman;—he a man more than usually callous, more than usually overbearing; she a woman more than usually sensitive, more than usually disposed to prefer the claims of others to her own.

Would nobody play the part of Perseus to this Andromeda? Ah! how powerless a man is to help a woman, however much he may wish to do so!—especially if—Harry pulled himself up abruptly.

"This comes of idleness," he said to himself impatiently; "the sooner you return to you duties the better, my friend. Have you steered your course so far prosperously, with philosophy for your compass and hope for your pole-star, only to fall into this pitfall after all? It won't do; it is folly, accursed folly, and will only lead to heartache. You can't do things by halves, so if you are wise you will escape while there is yet time. But *is* there yet time?

"Don't ask yourself that question, you fool, or you are lost!" he exclaimed. "And don't flatter yourself you can do anything to help her. As for that appealing look that

you see in her eyes, that is simply the effect of your own imagination, the result of 'expectant attention,' as Dick Evans would say. Philip is too much for her powers of resistance. Her will flutters helplessly at the call of his; she is like a terrified, half-bewitched bird when it hears the cry of the hawk. It is an iniquitous piece of work altogether!"

The next time that Harry went to Clevedon, Mr. Sedley was there, making himself agreeable to Arabella, and behaving altogether in his best and sweetest manner. This was an evil portent! He had proposed a walk to the sea, and Harry was asked to join the expedition.

As Viola and Philip were of the party, he assented, and he had the pleasure of listening for two long miles to the not very interesting conversation of Mr. Sedley while the other couple walked on ahead. Mr. Sedley was inclined to hang back to examine the crops, about which he had much to say. These were now in their freshest and greenest stage, gleaming and glistening under the blandishments of the sun, which seemed to be enticing the young life to new, and ever-new development, to end, as Harry moodily thought, in the final massacre of harvest.

The parable was painfully obvious. Seldom had he felt more sad and depressed than he did to-day amid these

sunny lands, where peace and plenty beamed, with rosy midsummer faces, while the sea sang its eternal slumber-song a few hundred feet below. In another month or less these scenes and people would have vanished; he must take his part in a new drama, and, alas! in that new drama he felt not the faintest interest!

Life seemed to him a miserable, tantalising, disappointing failure, full of heartache and tragedy; the sunniest temperament in the world could not save one from the universal doom!

So little would suffice for happiness: freedom, work, leisure, music, friendship, and—love. He did not demand fame or fortune, luxury or power; only those essentially human requirements without which no life is complete.

In consequence of Mr. Sedley's delays the other two had now gone a long way ahead, and Harry watched them nearing the cliff's edge and the point where the pathway of descent began. A superstitious feeling possessed him that if they went down that descent together Viola's fate was sealed. It would symbolise the future. He tried to urge his companion forward, but Mr. Sedley was relating an anecdote, and would not be hurried. He even found it necessary to pause now and then for greater emphasis.

Muttering an unintelligible apology, Harry broke away

and set off at a run for the cliff-side. But he was too late. He saw Philip hold out his hand, and then the two went down together to the deeps.

Harry felt as if something were tightening about his heart, as he stood there facing the breezes that came freshly up from the sea. The sunshine was beating upon the sweet grass and flowers just as before, and the sea murmured mournfully in the bright loneliness of the scene: "the gladness is taken away and the joy out of the plentiful field." Oh! the folly and madness of staking one's whole life upon one human being among the millions, so that the very heavens and earth might be blotted out, or left dark and ruined in their places!

The folly and the inevitableness of it!

. . . . . .

"I wonder what is the matter with Harry," Adrienne said to Dick Evans, whose friendship for her brother made him a suitable confidant on this topic; "I never saw him so moody and distracted; I can't think what's come to him."

"I suppose he hasn't got a rash anywhere?" inquired the scientific Dick thoughtfully, but Adrienne laughed at this supposition.

"Liver may be out of order," said Dick. "Does he eat well?"

"Like a cormorant. No, it isn't his liver. I think (if he *is* to be out of sorts, poor boy!) it would be more convenient if it *were* — from a housekeeper's point of view."

"He must be in love," said Dick, stooping at last from the pinnacle of science.

"Nonsense!" said Adrienne, startled. "Oh dear, I hope not; it would be such a serious matter with him, and I don't see how it could be otherwise than unfortunate. You know he has only a couple of hundreds a year besides his pay."

"Don't distress yourself in this anticipatory manner, Adrienne," advised Dick; "I put forth the suggestion merely as a working hypothesis."

That "working hypothesis" haunted Adrienne all night. She longed to speak to her brother, and to comfort him if she could, for her nature was essentially sympathetic; but Harry made some nonsensical reply to every tentative remark, and she had, as usual, to give in.

Mrs. Dixie, unaccustomed to her son's new mood, laughed inappropriately when he was remarking to the effect that all is vanity; and when she discovered that Harry actually meant that all was vanity, she had a whispered consultation with Adrienne about camomile

pills, and wondered if Harry would be very angry if she sent for the doctor.

In spite of his wise reflections the young man went next day to Clevedon. Apparently some arrangement for prolonging Viola's visit had been come to,—perhaps on the occasion of Mr. Sedley's call—for Harry found, with distress, that she was not to leave at the end of the week, according to the first intention. This looked very like a conspiracy between brother and sister, of which the girl was to be the victim. Sadly she needed a champion, but who was to take that difficult post? Harry did what he could: he tried to prevent too many *tête-à-têtes* with Philip, regardless of the latter's frowns; and he endeavoured to turn Viola's attention from her admirer, and to rivet it—if that were possible—upon himself. There was very little to be done, and Harry feared that Lady Clevedon would be annoyed at his interference, carefully as he tried to veil it.

Philip at this period was in his happiest mood—not at all a good sign, Harry thought, especially as he seldom mentioned Viola's name. He was loud in his praises of Lady Clevedon, who was one of the most agreeable women Philip had ever met, and, "ye gods, wasn't she sharp!"

If Harry seemed moody and out of sorts in the bosom

of his family, he took care not to let that accusation be made against him at Clevedon. Philip, above all, must not suspect his secret.

"I will say this for our hostess," said Philip expansively, "she knows how to make her house attractive. And what women she picks up! Arabella is simply bewildering!"

"So her host seems to think—a man who would 'rather face a crocodile than meet a ladies' school.' I believe, when all secrets are made known, that that poor fellow will be found to have undergone excruciating agony on account of Arabella."

"Hail, Arabella!" exclaimed Philip, raising an imaginary goblet to his lips; "tricksey-wicksey Arabella, sweet and stylish Arabella, who would not love thee, Arabella?"

"Poor woman! I am sure she does her little best to please you, you ungrateful fellow!"

"I am tired of women who try to please me," said Philip, stretching himself lazily. "It is quite extraordinary how they will run after a man in these days of universal competition! The marriage-market is overstocked; a woman has to get married at all hazards, and she will stick at nothing in the way of business. A man must be circumspect indeed to escape the dangers that beset him in the

highways of society. 'He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare.'"

"Well done!" exclaimed Harry. "I didn't know you could quote Scripture."

"My dear fellow, I was brought up on it; perhaps that may account for my cynicism regarding the adorable sex. However, I need no excuse; if you had run the gauntlet with as many mothers of daughters as I have, you would be a blasphemer too. They are simply pirates, neither more nor less!"

"It must be hard lines on a girl who doesn't want to be flung at a man's head, to have a predatory mother."

"Show me that girl, and I will wear her in my heart of hearts!"

"Well, without aspiring to that honourable post for my sister, I may point to her,—and then there is Miss Sedley."

Philip smiled.

"She is inexperienced, and she has been seriously brought up."

"I doubt if all the mothers in Christendom would have made her into a fisher of men."

Philip shook his head.

"Lives there a woman who is not Fortune's slave? Upon

my soul, I believe (with the exception of one or two who don't know anything about life) that such a being does not exist!"

"She must be a considerable heroine, I admit," said Harry, "for Fortune is hard upon women who refuse her obedience, and, in point of fact, I suppose even a woman must live. My sister at least goes so far as to hint it."

"Well, I suppose she must, in spite of Talleyrand," said Philip, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Henry VIII., when he cleared away the monasteries, might have left the convents, I think."

"Do you? Ask my sister and Mrs. Lincoln for *their* opinion on that point."

"Oh! Mrs. Lincoln's eccentricities put her out of court," said Philip.

The appearance of Viola at this juncture interrupted the colloquy. Philip sprang up and waved her to his place on the seat, and Harry rose also.

"Please don't move; my mother is here; she came about two hours ago; and Aunt Augusta says, will you come in and see her, Mr. Dendraith?"

"With the greatest pleasure; but how cruel of her to send such a messenger," cried Philip, allowing his meaning to be guessed by the ingenious. "Lancaster, try and be enter-

taining enough to keep Miss Sedley till I return," and he strolled off with his easy, swinging walk across the grass.

"Philip has set me a task that I don't feel at all equal to," said Harry, piercing a plantain with his stick.

"Oh! please don't trouble—I don't want you to be entertaining—though you always are so."

"A man can take no heavier burden upon himself than the reputation of a buffoon," said Harry. "Nevermore—though the *rôle* of chief mourner would better become him—may he lay it down."

"Are you—a chief mourner?" asked Viola, her voice softening at the call for sympathy.

"I am indeed," said Harry; "and sole mourner too, if that is not paradoxical."

There was a pause; then the very atmosphere around seemed to throb, as Harry heard his own words escape him: "My trouble is on your account."

"*On my account!*"

Her surprise made him add hastily, "I ought not to have said this much, as I can't say all I should like to say;—in fact, I fear I am very impertinent to speak at all; it was not premeditated."

She looked fairly bewildered.

"I wish you would tell me frankly what you mean," she

said; "you don't know of any pending misfortune for me or mine, do you? But if you did, you could scarcely take it so much to heart."

"There you mistake," said Harry; "but"—he pressed his hands to his head—"I ought really not to have spoken in this way. Forget and forgive it."

It was impossible to speak out! it seemed so underhand, so mean, especially since he had a new and selfish motive to prevent the marriage. If Philip had won the girl's heart, and was trying to win her hand, what right had any one to interfere? It was not as if she were being actually forced into the marriage. Yet could this inexperienced creature, brought up to submit her own will in all things, be regarded as a free agent, when people like Lady Clevedon, Philip Dendraith, Mr. Sedley, and even Arabella were conspiring against her?

"If you can warn me about something, and will not, Mr. Lancaster, I think you are unkind," said Viola reproachfully.

"Oh! don't say that; if you knew how it hurts me to hear it!" he exclaimed. "What can I do?"

He paused in deep and painful thought.

"This much I think I may say, and I must trust to you to take it in good part. It is my earnest advice to you to

leave this place as soon as you can, no matter on what pretext, and if possible to leave the neighbourhood; at any rate, refuse to see, or avoid seeing, all callers. I know it sounds ridiculously like an advertisement in the Agony Column, but I can't help that. If you would only take what I say on trust, and not demand further explanation, you would do me a very great favour. My desire to serve you is most heartfelt, believe me."

His manner and the thrill in his voice amply confirmed his words.

Viola's reply was cut short by the arrival of Philip and Arabella, and Harry had no means of finding out for the rest of that day how she had taken his strange advice, or whether she intended to act on it.

With increased seriousness Mrs. Dixie, on his return to the Cottage, began to talk of sending for the doctor, and Adrienne to ponder over Dick Evans' "working hypothesis."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRISIS.

"WELL, Marion, what now? Has Richard been forgetting he is a gentleman again? Drinking, swearing, or both?"

In his sister Mr. Sedley always found one of his severest critics.

"I did not come here to complain of my husband, Augusta."

"I wish to Heaven you had! You really ought not to allow him to trample on you as he does. Remember, a man will always be as much of a fiend as you will let him."

Mrs. Sedley was silent.

"Well, Marion, what is the trouble?"

"It is about my poor daughter," replied Mrs. Sedley; "her father has been speaking to me very peremptorily on the subject of her marriage."

"He spoke to me about it too," said Lady Clevedon; "*not* peremptorily," she added, with a laugh.

"He has so much respect for your judgment."

"He has such a wholesome dread of my agile tongue," said Lady Clevedon. "Well, Marion?"

"Mr. Dendraith has spoken to Richard on the subject, and asked his consent to an engagement between him and Viola, but he has not yet spoken definitely to Viola herself."

"I thought it was coming to that," said Lady Clevedon, "and I think it is a matter for rejoicing. The girl could not make a better marriage, and I need not remind you of the important bearing that it will have upon the affairs of the family in general—the boys and so on."

Mrs. Sedley sighed. "Yes; I do not overlook all that; but—will it be for Viola's happiness? I fear greatly that Mr. Dendraith is a man of no religious principle."

"Perhaps he may have what is better," said Lady Clevedon, with pagan calmness: "moral principle."

"I fear he is not even all one might wish as to that, if one is to believe rumours."

"He has his enemies, and I dare say he is not immaculate, but I think he is just the man for Viola; he is born to rule and has the devil's own temper. Women are all the better for a little frightening."

It had, however, never occurred to Lady Clevedon to look out for the terrific creature who could frighten *her*.

"Before Viola came to stay with you," continued Mrs. Sedley, "she made her father very angry by avoiding Mr. Dendraith when he called. Richard spoke to me about it, and insisted on my using my influence to bring her to a different frame of mind. It was very painful to me, for the poor child took it so much to heart, and cried out that even I had forsaken her."

"So you told me at the time," said Lady Clevedon, "and very miserable you were about it."

"Now, however, by all accounts," Mrs. Sedley went on, "she seems to be changing in her feelings towards Mr. Dendraith. Is that really the case?"

"He has certainly made an impression."

"Ah! that troubles me!" cried Mrs. Sedley; "that troubles me greatly!"

"Oh! was there ever such a determined miserable!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon. "To-day she comes to me like Niobe, all tears, because her daughter objects to the marriage proposed for her by her parents; to-morrow she comes to me once more—the identical drops still wet upon her cheeks, ready to do duty over again; but this time because the daughter is *favourable* to the marriage! My dear Marion, what would you have?"

"I would have my child both good and happy, and I am

sadly afraid that no woman can hope for such a combination in this world."

"Depends on what you mean by good and what you mean by happy," said Lady Clevedon.

"My position," continued Mrs. Sedley, "is the more trying because dear Viola would do anything that I asked her to do. She makes me her guide and her conscience. How can I persuade her into a marriage which, I fear, may not be for her happiness? And how, on the other hand, can I conscientiously urge her to oppose her father's will? Can the blessing of Heaven descend upon the rebellious child, or upon the mother who encourages her rebellion?"

"If the woman hasn't ingeniously got herself impaled upon *another* two-legged dilemma!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon. "Marion, how do you manage to fall in with these monstrosities? You can't be content with a sound, able-bodied trouble, like any other Christian; you must needs pick up creatures with more heads and limbs than they ought to have—a sort of Briarean woe dreadful to contemplate. If you had been a general, Marion, the Caudine Forks is the battle that you would have fought, and straightway you would have gone and got yourself ingeniously wedged between the prongs!"

"I think life is made up of these many-sided difficulties," said Mrs. Sedley sadly. "Augusta," she went on, laying her hand on her sister-in-law's arm, "you have influence with Richard; should the poor child really show a repugnance to the marriage, you will not refuse to use it on her side."

Lady Clevedon shook her head.

"I can't promise anything. The marriage seems to me so rational that I hope Viola will be wiser than to show any repugnance to it. I don't think, mind you, that a girl should marry a rich man when she dislikes him, but there is no reason to dislike a man simply because he *is* rich and well-born. Many romantic girls make a point of doing that as in duty bound."

No help was to be had from her sister-in-law in this matter, and Mrs. Sedley had then to come to the second object of her visit, namely, to take Viola back to the Manor-House. Lady Clevedon scoffed and scorned, and insisted that her niece must stay, but Mrs. Sedley was quietly determined. She did not tell her sister-in-law that the girl had herself written, earnestly entreating her mother to recall her.

Strangely still and lifeless seemed the old home when Viola saw it again after her ten days' absence. With all its

familiarity, it was to her as if she had never seen the place before. And the routine of the days! without change, without movement; they were like a stagnant, overshadowed pool, where there was never a glimpse of the blue heaven, never a ripple or a sparkle from dawn to dark. Viola thought the life of Clevedon empty and flippant, but at least it had some flash and brilliance.

She felt restless and unhappy. She could not settle to her old life; memories of the past ten days haunted her, and filled her with a vague longing for excitement.

Some new chord in her being had been touched; she was angry with herself; angry with her surroundings; ashamed at her own inability to resume her former simple life. She felt she had lost ground; new feelings made havoc with her self-control; she was like a rudderless ship at the mercy of contrary winds. Gardening was the best sedative for this restlessness, though that occupation had the disadvantage of allowing her thoughts to work as well as her hands.

Contrary to Mr. Sedley's hopes, Philip Dendraith did not at once follow up his preliminary overtures. He was reported to have gone up to town, a proceeding which caused much suffering to the family of the Lord of the Manor. Mr. Sedley suspected that Viola had rebuffed

her lover, and she had to listen to some parental plain-speaking on the subject.

"If it were not for my mother, I would not remain here another moment!" Viola had once cried out passionately, bringing down upon her head such a torrent of rage and scorn that she actually left her father fully meaning to do even as she had said. Such taunts were more than she could endure. But at the sight of her mother her resolution broke down; she could not make yet sadder that sad, pale face, and bring tears to the eyes that had shed so many bitter ones already.

On one balmy afternoon Viola betook herself to the rose-garden, a narrow grass-plot beside the Lovers' Walk, the dark foliage of whose yew-trees formed an almost tragic background to the beds of roses and summer flowers among which Viola was moving, busy with her scissors and her hoe.

She was dressed in white; her sunlit figure stood out in strong contrast to the dark masses behind her. A fanciful person might have seen symbols in the picture.

A tame jackdaw, Bill Dawkins' successor but not supplanter in her affections, hopped amiably around, amusing himself with pecking at pieces of stick, hauling weeds out of Viola's basket on the sly, and other mischievous actions which he knew he might venture on with impunity.

"Charming!" cried a voice, breaking the sunny silence. "Would that I were an artist!"

Viola turned, and the admired picture was by no means marred by the addition of Philip Dendraith's handsome figure as he raised his hat and strode across the grass-plot.

She coloured and smiled in a manner that pleased him well.

"So it is to you that the Manor-House owes its wonderful roses! *L'art d'être belle!* What better teacher could they have?"

Viola sighed. She wished that she could understand this man, but not being able to, she resigned herself to her ignorance.

"I find they best learn how to be beautiful by being happy," she said, "so I try to make them so."

She was going on with her hoeing now in a desultory way.

"And you make them happy by bestowing on them the light of your presence," said Philip in a low voice.

"And by introducing them to my most agreeable friends," added Viola, with a quick glance.

Philip almost started; the speech was so unlike one of Viola's. He had expected blushes and downcast looks, and he encountered instead something distantly approach-

ing mockery. It was one of those excursions from her normal self which had now and then, of late, caused her to wonder at herself. She had caught unconsciously the trick of phrase characteristic of Clevedon and its guests; and this, still echoing in her memory, was given forth, here and there, almost mechanically, as we hum some haunting refrain. But the change of tone passed away as suddenly as it had come, and she blushed at her own masquerading.

"My dear Miss Sedley, I think you have worked long enough," said Philip, taking the hoe from her with gentle insistence. "Your roses have had you all to themselves too long; it is my turn now to be made happy"——

"And beautiful," added Viola. "I make my roses happy by watering them"——

"Miss Sedley!" exclaimed Philip, looking round at her, "I am afraid you have become rather flippant since I had the pleasure of seeing you."

"I fear I have," said Viola, with a sigh.

"Don't sigh; it is quite charming, I assure you, and becomes you mightily. Only please don't be too hard upon *me*."

Without reply she allowed herself to be led to the rustic seat opposite the sun-dial, whereon the jackdaw

sat, alternately pruning his feathers and pecking at the shadow with his beak.

The bird seemed agitated when Philip took his place beside Viola.

"Your jackdaw is apparently jealous," he said. "I suppose you are very fond of him. I should imagine you had a large power of loving."

"And of hating," added the girl.

"Yes; *I* can answer for that!" exclaimed Philip, with a laugh. "Don't you think, now, that you owe me some reparation for having hated me so fiercely in the past?"

She looked troubled.

"Don't you think," Philip went on, drawing nearer to her, "that if the possession of your love had become the supreme desire and object of my life, you ought at least to try to give it to me?"

She breathed quickly, but answered nothing.

"You must know, dear Viola, that such *is* my supreme desire; that you have entered and possessed my heart as I thought no woman ever could have possessed it; you have enslaved my thoughts, my dreams, my very will! This last week has been a blank to me because you were absent. I am telling you the absolute truth—I have never

felt before what I feel now; I shall never be happy till you promise to love me and be my wife."

He was so much in earnest that he had thrown off his usual calm manner; his measured periods had given place to the rough, quick utterance of strong emotion.

There is something peculiarly moving in the emotion of a person generally very self-possessed, the more so if the person is of Philip Dendraith's type.

"Viola, don't turn away from me; tell me, do you not love me?"

"Kiaw!" said the inconvenient jackdaw, in a loud voice.

This was merely a displeased comment upon the arrival of Thomas with a watering-pot, Thomas not being in the habit of showing that deference towards Jack which Jack thought was his due.

"Ill-omened old man!" exclaimed Philip; "and you, most obstructive fowl, well is it for you that you enjoy the protection of a lady's presence! Who was it that said that a woman can forgive anything in her lover, except that he should appear ridiculous? Have I committed the unpardonable offence?"

"Oh! don't talk to me like this!" cried Viola, with a desperate gesture. "I am not a clever lady of society who can understand and answer you."

She looked round in search of Thomas, but that discreet person, having (after a certain lapse of time) seen what was going on, took up his watering-pot and trudged off to "pastures new," with an expression about his left eye absolutely beyond human power to describe.

Geoffrey finding him in this sublimated state of knowingness, and receiving from him sundry oracular hints, was "prepared for the worst," as he said, more especially as he found his father in a seraphic temper pacing the terrace with Mrs. Sedley, and calling her attention to the exceeding fineness of the "immemorial elms." Those elms were in process of being secured to the family, perhaps for centuries.

"I fear you think that because I am sometimes flippant I can never be serious," said Philip earnestly, "but you never were more mistaken in your life. I own that I think very few things of much consequence, but for that very reason I have the more ardour to throw into those that I *do* care about. Ah! Viola, don't tell me that I have set my heart on the unattainable!"

The conflict that was going on in her mind at this moment was entirely unsuspected by Philip; he supposed that her efforts to silence him proceeded from mere girlish bashfulness, and that he had only to persevere in order to complete his triumph.

He leant forward and took her hand.

"Dearest," he began—and then stopped abruptly, for at his touch Viola had drawn her hand away with a sharp movement anything but suggestive of a coming triumph for him.

"I wish you would not speak like this; you distress me," she said, in a strange, bewildered way.

"Viola, I think you are really very unkind," cried Philip, "when you know how devoted I am to you!"

"I am very sorry," was all that she would say in reply to this and to other pleading of the same kind.

Philip was astonished, piqued, but all the more determined to achieve his object. He knew that practically it was achieved already, for he had her father on his side, and through him Mrs. Sedley also; that was enough; only he longed to make the girl come to him willingly and gladly. As a last resource alone would he employ the parental influence, but he had no intention of surrendering his purpose, let come what would. Did he not love her as he had never loved before, and was he not ready to lavish upon her every indulgence that money and influence could command? If an unwilling bride, she should become a loving and a happy wife, and what more could the heart of woman desire? Besides, a woman of this type was the slave of

her conscience. Marriage changed the colour of things to the feminine mind; what once was black became suddenly white, and *vice versâ*. Duty, religion, convenience, all came trooping to the front after the wedding-ring was fairly on; a man ran no risk in marrying a woman of the dutiful kind, though she had to be dragged to the altar by wild horses. So spoke unequivocally the voice of experience.

"Viola, am I, then, entirely indifferent to you? Would you not care if I were to go away and never come and see you any more?"

Viola's truthfulness obliged her to confess that she *would* care, and Philip, pressing his advantage, made her own that he fascinated her.

"Then why do you repel me as you do? Why will you not accept my love?"

"Oh! don't ask me;—for pity's sake, don't speak of this any more!"

Philip was fairly puzzled, and not a little annoyed. He was silent for a moment, and then said, with an abrupt energy, startlingly different from his ordinary manner, "You are not engaged secretly to some one else?"

"Oh! no, oh! no," she said quickly.

The expression of relief that came into his face was as striking as the anxiety that preceded it.

"And your affections are not engaged elsewhere?"

"No."

"Then I shall prevail! Think of your parents, Viola, if you will not think of me; consider how happy you would make them. I have already spoken to your father, and he gives his consent freely."

"I do not doubt it," she said, with bitterness.

A smile flitted across Philip's face.

"And your good mother; she too has set her heart upon our marriage, though she may not tell you so, because she wishes your own heart to decide the question!"

"*My mother!*" exclaimed Viola; "does *she* wish it?"

"She wishes it, undoubtedly. Why not talk the matter over with her? I do not want to hurry you for an answer, impatient as I am to know my fate. Will you do that? I will come to-morrow, not for my answer, unless you like, but merely to see you again. Do try and think of me as kindly as you can. Ah! dearest, it is hard to leave you in this state of suspense. *Au revoir*, and be merciful. My happiness is in your hands. Good-bye till to-morrow."

"Kiaw!" said the jackdaw derisively.

CHAPTER XIV.

DECIDED.

Mrs. Sedley was discovered in the cold shadows of the morning-room which she had chosen for her special domain. It faced north, was severely furnished, and colour apparently had not been invented at the time of its upholstering. She was dressed in black, with dead white folds of muslin at the throat and wrists. Once she had been persuaded to order a gown of stone-colour, which she scarcely ever wore, on the ground that it was too gay for her.

When Viola entered, her mother was sitting working in a low chair; a quiet, grave figure, with smooth, shining hair severely brushed down over the temples, the busy fingers alone giving sign of animation.

She looked up and greeted her daughter with a sad, loving smile.

"What is it, dearest?" she asked, laying her thin hand on the table.

Viola struggled with her habitual reserve for a moment;

then she said, "Mother, Mr. Dendraith has just left me; —and—I want to speak to you."

Mrs. Sedley dropped her work; her hands trembled.

Viola had placed herself beside her mother, with her back to the light. She leant her head on her hand, and spoke in a quick, low tone.

"Mr. Dendraith wants me to marry him; he says he will never be happy till I consent. He says that my father wishes it (which I knew) and that *you* wish it. Is that the case?"

Mrs. Sedley took her daughter's hand in hers, and silently caressed it for a few seconds. Then she bent her head and laid the little hand upon her brow, with a movement more emotional than Viola had ever seen in her before.

"I will tell you all that father and I have been thinking about the matter, dearest. You know that of late there have been many business difficulties, so great that we shall not be able to live here much longer unless some relief comes. In proposing for you, Mr. Dendraith made most generous offers to your father, and as Mr. Dendraith is a man of good family and fortune, handsome, clever, and of agreeable manner, your father thinks that you can have no possible objection to such a marriage. He is naturally anxious for it, as you may suppose, and he cannot under

stand that you may not care for Mr. Dendraith enough to marry him. Seeing your father so bent upon it, I entreated him to let you have ample opportunity to judge for yourself. I trust your visit to your aunt has given you some insight into Mr. Dendraith's character and your own feelings towards him. Your aunt seemed to think that you were beginning to care for him."

Viola looked startled.

"Question your own heart searchingly, dear child, and consider, too, what is your duty in this matter. Pray for guidance where alone you can obtain it. I have thought and thought till my head and heart ache, and I have prayed, and I fear that I can see only one path of duty for you, my child. Earnestly do I trust that you may be given strength to tread it."

"Then you *do* desire this marriage?" said Viola.

"I desire only that my child should do what is right and dutiful, leaving the rest to God. Her father, her brothers, all are depending on her decision"——

"And her mother!" cried Viola.

"Oh! do not think of *her*, dearest! She suffers only through the sufferings of her beloved ones. But your father's state of health gives me great anxiety, and if we should have to leave the Manor-House"——

"It might kill him," said Viola, "and you too!"—Was it the cold light of the room that made her look so pale?

"On the other hand," said Mrs. Sedley, "I do not wish you to enter upon this marriage if it is really repugnant to your feelings. That I cannot countenance. Consider the question from every side, and do not forget that this opportunity may have been given you for the saving of this young man's soul!"

"O mother! it is no more possible to talk to Mr. Dendraith about these matters than to Aunt Augusta. And who am I, of little faith, to move such a man?"

"We know not what instruments it may please the Lord to use," said Mrs. Sedley.

. . . . . .

"Well, Viola, your mother tells me that you have been speaking to her about Philip Dendraith's proposal. I hope you appreciate your wonderful good fortune."

She was silent.

"The affair had better be brought to a crisis at once; I can't understand why you did not accept him on the spot without this silly girlish shilly-shallying. I am going over now to Upton Court, and will take your answer and settle the matter out of hand!"

A moment of terrible inward conflict; Viola stood with

bowed head and clasped hands, her mother's words burning into her brain: "duty, right—the rest to God—your father and your brothers—to leave the Manor-House—might kill him,"—and above all rose the thought of that mother herself, racked and tortured in the impending misfortune of her family, the real weight of which would fall upon her shoulders.

Viola raised her head. The garden seemed to spin round her; the air became thick and black.

"I'll tell him you say 'yes,' of course," said her father.

"Tell him I say 'yes,'" repeated Viola.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.

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3 0112 004624596